

3rd Edition

Adrian Schulz

Architectural Photography

Composition,
Capture,
and Digital Image Processing

rockynook

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Third Edition

With Comments by Marcus Bredt

rocky**nook**

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This book is printed on acid-free paper.

This book is dedicated to
my wife and son

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1 Introduction

The digital photographic medium is currently on an unprecedented roll, and ever-increasing numbers of people are beginning to experiment with the challenges and rewards of this most modern medium. Thanks to the digital revolution, architectural photography, with its endless variety of exciting subjects, has won many new fans among beginners and experienced photographers. Architectural photographers today are blessed with endless creative ways to capture and display their subjects.

It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words, and this is particularly true in the field of architectural photography. There is no better medium than a balanced, well-taken photograph for capturing and displaying the look and feel of a building. This book uses numerous pictures to illustrate the concepts described in the text, and it provides answers to many theoretical and practical questions regarding equipment, technique, and the reasons buildings sometimes look so different in a photo than they do in reality. There are also comprehensive sections on ways to improve your images and the opportunities presented by the magic of digital image processing.

You will quickly find that architectural photography is a unique and fascinating photographic genre.

1.1 What Is Architectural Photography?

The term “architectural photography” describes both the subject (architecture) and the means of capturing it (photography).

The word “architecture” comes from the Greek “arkhitekton,” which consists of roots meaning “chief” and “builder.” Architecture is ubiquitous in our lives, and its primary function as shelter encompasses a great many functional uses. Architecture is practically a human’s second skin. Le Corbusier once said, “Architecture is one of the most urgent needs of man, for the house has always been the indispensable and first tool that he has forged for himself.”

Architecture takes on an extremely broad range of forms, from simple, primeval huts, to the ornate temples of antiquity, the purely functional factories of the industrial revolution, and the urban concrete and glass landmarks of today. Without architecture, mankind would have remained anchored in the stone age with few options of places to live, sleep, eat, work, trade, produce, withdraw, rest, administer, and educate. In many regions, climatic conditions would make life without architecture

impossible.

The word “photography” comes from the Greek “photos” and “graphé,” which means “drawing with light,” and describes a technical means of optically capturing the likeness of objects and making them palpable in places where they cannot normally be seen. Photography thus propagates images of buildings into the wider world, enabling people to view them in a wide variety of circumstances—whether in newspapers, books, posters, the Internet, or in galleries or museums.

1.2The History of Architectural Photography

1.2.1Early History

The history of architectural photography stretches back to the beginning of the 19th century when the very first photographic attempts were made. Prior to these experiments, the extreme significance of architecture to mankind gave rise to the first paintings of buildings in ancient times ([fig. 1](#)). Paintings of buildings are two-dimensional representations of three-dimensional objects, although they are not as directly connected to specific buildings as architectural photographs. Renaissance painters like Michelangelo or Raphael painted bold architectural visions ([fig. 2](#)). During the Baroque period, painting was used as an integral part of many architectural designs—wall and ceiling frescos often served to enhance the design of the building itself, and painted surfaces were used to extend the appearance of architectural space ([fig. 3](#)).



Fig. 1: A mural in Pompeii, 1st century AD

Around the same time, architectural subjects began to represent an independent genre, especially in the context of Dutch Baroque painting. Public squares and buildings were reproduced in context and in great detail (fig. 4). Other artistic techniques, such as etchings that were popular at the time, also used architecture as their subject. European cityscapes by Matthäus Merian (fig. 5) are a particularly good example of this subgenre. In 18th century Italy, the popular veduta paintings represent extremely realistic landscapes and cityscapes. While creating his famous paintings of Venice and Dresden (fig. 6), Bernardo Bellotto used the camera obscura as a technical aid to producing realistic work. The idea, which goes back to Renaissance times and was also used by the Dutch Baroque painters, is

considered to be the forerunner of the modern photographic camera. In Bellotto's era, the device took the form of a portable box with a lens that projected the view in front of the lens onto a ground glass screen. This enabled the artist to accurately reproduce the perspective of the chosen scene (fig. 7). This guarantee of precise perspective in paintings and drawings encouraged continued development of the camera.



Fig. 2: Raphael, The School of Athens, Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican City, 16th century fresco



Fig. 3: Cosmas Damian Asam, ceiling fresco in Ettlingen, late Baroque period



Fig. 4: Jan van der Heyden, The Church at Veere, 17th century, oil on canvas



Fig. 5: Matthäus Merian, Lübeck, 17th century, etching



Fig. 6: Bernardo Belotto, View of Dresden, mid- 18th century, oil and tempera on canvas

1.2.2The Invention of Photography

Although the camera obscura and light-sensitive materials had already been discovered, the invention of the modern photographic process did not take shape until the beginning of the 19th century. In 1827, Nicéphore Niépce used an exposure of several hours and an asphalt-coated plate to capture the view from his window. He called the resulting image a heliograph ([fig. 8](#)). This earliest surviving photograph encapsulates one of the hallmarks of an architectural photo, namely, a depiction of perspective. This image is, coincidentally, also the first architectural photograph, even if the subject was chosen for practical rather than aesthetic reasons. Alongside still lifes, the static nature of architectural subjects made them popular in the early days of photography when extremely long exposure times made it impossible to capture moving subjects.

At around the same time as Niépce, Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre and William Henry Fox Talbot were experimenting with ways to capture photographs that involved exposure times of just a few minutes. Daguerre's street scenes ([fig. 9](#)) are famous examples from this period. His Daguerrotype images were all unique and unfortunately cannot be duplicated. Fox Talbot's Calotype process couldn't reproduce the same level of detail as Daguerre's plates, but its negative/positive principle made it possible to duplicate images once they had been captured ([fig. 10](#)).

The new medium developed quickly in the following years (fig. 11). An album of photographs of the world's most famous buildings was presented in Paris in 1841, and by the end of the 19th century, photographs were becoming an important element of architectural books and magazines. The disassembly, relocating, and reassembly of Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace and the building of the Eiffel Tower in Paris were both documented photographically (fig. 12). Architectural photography began to be used to make foreign countries and cultures accessible to the general public, as well as to document the possessions of individuals and institutions. At this time, reproducibility and documentation were the main motivations behind architectural photography, so the resulting images were correspondingly static, conservative, and often cumbersome.

1.2.3 The Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

Changes in architectural styles following World War I brought changes in how buildings were photographed. The Bauhaus movement founded by Walter Gropius in 1919 began to consider photography as an art form, viewing the medium as "the perfect combination of manual dexterity, technical progress, and artistic expression." The German photographers Albert Renger-Patzsch, August Sander, and Karl Bloßfeldt practiced a photographic style termed "New Objectivity." American artists like Walker Evans began to photograph purely functional subjects such as grain silos and factories. Using selective composition and unusual viewpoints of existing structures in their images, photographers began to give architecture a dynamic of its own.

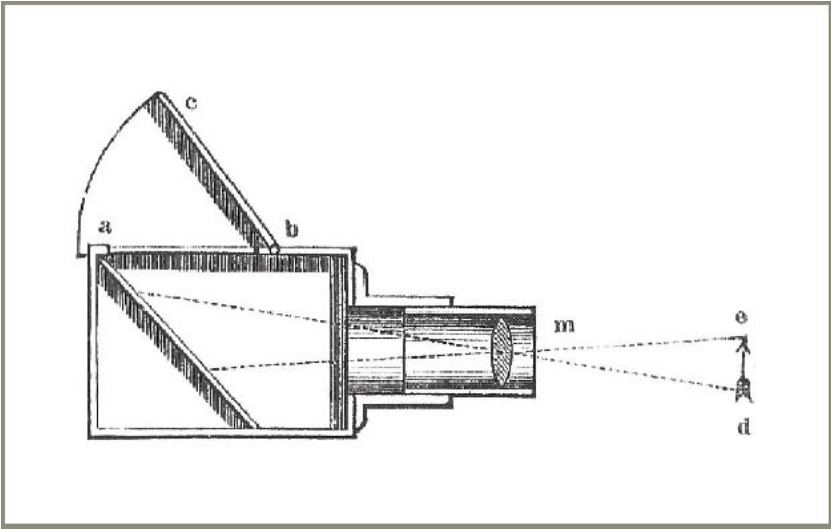


Fig. 7: The Camera Obscura

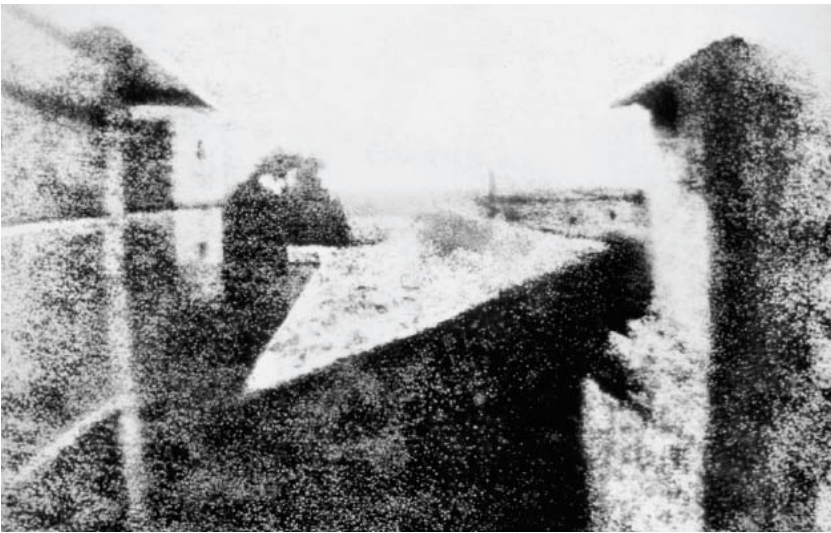


Fig. 8: Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, View from the Window at Le Gras, Chalon-sur-Saône, 1827



Fig. 9: Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, Boulevard du Temple, Paris, 1838



Fig. 10: William Henry Fox Talbot, Boulevard des Capucines, Paris, 1843

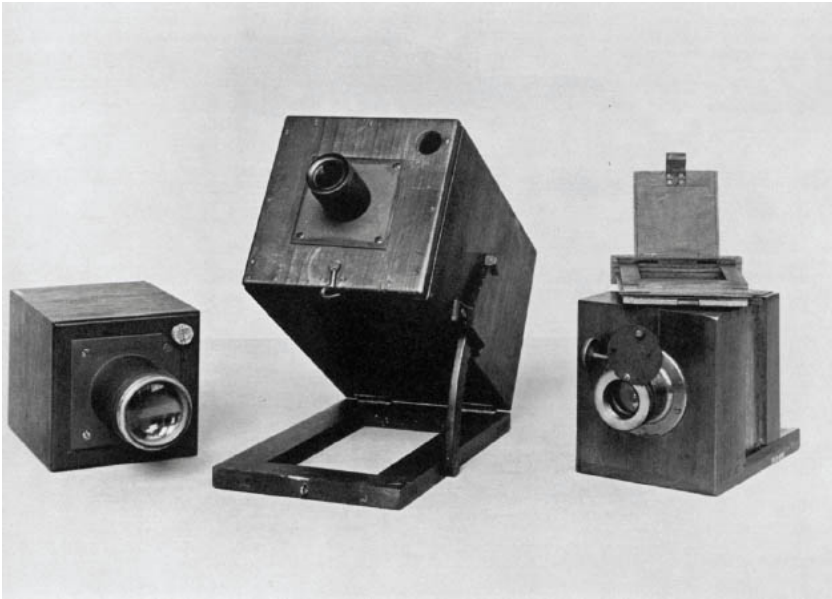


Fig. 11: Mid-19th century cameras



Fig. 12: Pierre Petit, The Building of the Eiffel Tower, Paris, 1888

Technical progress in the following years increased the quality of

architectural photos, while outstanding photographers like Andreas Feininger experimented with self-built cameras. It was Feininger who developed the world's (then) largest telephoto lens, and with it a new way of taking photographs. The advent of pocket-sized 35mm cameras prior to World War II (fig. 13) encouraged spontaneous, subjective photography, and the medium became available to the masses. The flexibility of smaller camera systems transformed the camera into a new kind of notebook and gave birth to modern photojournalism. Post-war architectural photography developed into a purely practical form of documentation, especially in Germany, and served mainly press and advertising purposes.



Fig. 13: Leica II, 1932

Artistic architectural photography began to develop as a genre toward the end of the 1950s. Artists such as Hilla and Bernd Becher systematically photographed anonymous, monumental industrial architecture, creating extensive sequences of images showing buildings in various states of decay. The idea of the documentary photo series gained worldwide popularity and blurred the distinction between “good” and “bad” architecture. Buildings that didn’t conform to the perceived aesthetic of modern architecture received just as much attention, and the advent of art galleries and the large-scale production of coffee-table books in the 1970s underscored the importance of the genre as a whole. Whether ancient or modern, grouped or freestanding, well known or unfamiliar, the range of

potential architectural subjects is virtually unlimited.

The popular photographic boom continued toward the end of the 20th century. International exhibitions travelled the world, and prices of photographs at auction reached previously unheard-of levels. The introduction of digital technology brought with it the ability to correct image perspective and distortion—tasks that were previously extremely difficult to perform. Traditional aspects of architectural photography, such as the documentation of construction sites, began to take on artistic aspects, giving architectural photography a twin role as an artistic and documentary medium.

The development of digital photography over the last 10 years hasn't changed architectural photography per se, but has brought about enormous changes to the methods used to perform it. Although digital technology has banished 35mm and medium-format photography to the role of niche practices, large-format cameras capable of producing higher quality images than their digital cousins are still in widespread use, despite the high cost involved.

1.3 Authenticity in Architectural Photos

Just like the field of architecture itself, there are various approaches available to shoot architectural photographs, ranging from purely functional to complete artistic abstraction.

Documentary architectural photography walks a narrow path between presenting a neutral visual experience and an authentic representation of the inherent values of a building (fig. 14). Here, the composition has to limit itself to communicating information—otherwise, the building will lose its central importance and the photo itself will become the center of attention.

This raises the question of whether it is possible to shoot truly authentic architectural photos. Even the most perfect, realistic architectural photo has a certain degree of intrinsic abstraction, if only due to the artificial scale of the reproduction or the lack of a third dimension. Ergo, it is impossible to portray a building absolutely authentically using external media. Additionally, a photo can only reproduce the emotions felt by the viewer in a given situation. In other words, the way a building is perceived where it stands is often completely different from the way it is perceived in a photograph. In his essay “Medien zwischen Sein und Schein” (“Media

Between Myth and Reality”), published in 2000, the architect Meinhard von Gerkan said, “An architectural photo is almost bound to be a visual lie because the medium seems to represent the greatest possible potential objective authenticity, . . . true to the fact that a lens is an incorruptible technical device. We know it is an illusion.”



Fig. 14: A documentary architectural photo

At what point does architectural photography become art, and how can we differentiate between artistic architectural photography and its documentary sibling? The transition between the two is difficult to pinpoint, but it is safe to say that art begins where the intervention of the photographer begins to influence the purely documentary nature of a photo. This is where the choice of subject is no longer intrinsically connected with the impression made by the building. A building can be the central element of an image without actually divulging its function. This process makes us increasingly independent from architecture itself, and objective representation loses significance.

Further extrapolation of this line of thought unavoidably leads to the notion that a photo of a building can have a visual impact that is completely independent from the nature of the building’s architecture. The quality of the resulting image will then, logically, be judged on the basis of its own artistic merits, and not on the quality of the building it portrays.

Compositional techniques such as deliberate exaggeration, emphasis and omission, or simplification and distortion can be used to influence specific effects to the point where the building itself becomes the photographer's plaything—a clear indication that we are, after all, dealing with art (fig. 15).

1.4 Forms of Architectural Photography

Architectural photography in various forms is part of our everyday lives.

Documentary architectural photography: Many documentary architectural photographs can be found in books, magazines, brochures, and construction documents. In these cases, architectural photography takes the form of multiple images with accompanying explanations, plans, or drawings that are designed to precisely describe a building and its attributes.

Postcard photography: Architecture is often the subject of postcards, even if the photographer's intentions and degree of precision are not the same as those found in documentary situations. Postcards often serve simply as proof that the sender was actually in a particular place. Such photos serve only as a means of recognition and are often reproduced with oversaturated colors, over-the-top effects, and scant regard for technical prowess.



Fig. 15: An artistic architectural photo

Vacation photography: Tourists often have similar intentions when they photograph churches, castles, and other landmarks: Such photos form personal memories. While architecture is part of the subject, the location is

usually more important than the type of building. Interestingly, these types of photos are taken almost exclusively while on vacation. If located where one lives, buildings like these are considered neither newsworthy nor photogenic (fig. 16).

Advertising photography: Architecture often plays a role in poster, magazine, and TV advertising, and is often used to enhance the apparent significance of a product. Modern architecture stands for progress, technology, high quality of life, and glamour. For example, the automobile industry uses many manipulated architectural images in its advertising, employing stylistic devices such as color adjustments, deliberate distortion, stylization, image blending, and artificial reflections.

Artistic architectural photography: Artistic architectural photographs can often be found in galleries and exhibitions, usually in the context of a particular theme or artist. Here, architecture serves only as a means to an end, with no particular connection between the message of the image and the message conveyed by the architecture itself. In this case, it is the photographer and not the architect who is the focus of the activity.



Fig. 16: Although architecture is the subject of this vacation photograph, the building is much less important than the location

2 Camera Technology

This chapter will help you to decide which equipment to use for your architectural photography. I will consider your personal requirements and intentions and how they can influence your choice of camera. I will also discuss which lenses and accessories are best suited for capturing a variety of architectural subjects.

First and foremost, I would like to stress that you don't need a lot of equipment to take high-quality architectural photos. A good photographer can make fascinating photos with the simplest of cameras, while less talented people are unable to produce quality images using even the most elaborate and expensive gear. Expensive equipment is not the key to successful architectural photos—the crucial factor is always the person behind the camera. The camera is only a tool used to help you realize a photographic idea.

The photographer Andreas Feininger once said, “The fact that a (in the traditional sense) technically deficient photograph can have greater emotional impact than a technically flawless picture probably comes as a shock to those who are naive enough to believe that technical excellence alone is a measure of a value of a photograph.”

Nevertheless, a set of equipment selected for its suitability to your personal shooting style greatly simplifies the photographic process and forms the ideal basis for successful photos.

2.1 Advantages and Disadvantages of Digital Cameras

Until recently, the most important choice a photographer had to make was between digital and analog systems. Nowadays, digital technology has superseded analog equipment for virtually all types of photography.

However, digital technology has its shortcomings too, and every photographer has to learn to deal with them in the course of his/her work.

2.1.1 The Number and Availability of Images

One of the great advantages of digital cameras is their ability to display results immediately. The data captured by the sensor can be instantaneously analyzed and processed. Poorly exposed images no longer represent a waste of expensive material and can be quickly analyzed and deleted. In contrast to the analog process, shooting digital photos doesn't require the purchase and use of film and no longer involves complex development or digitizing processes. Once an image file has been transferred to a computer—either wirelessly or by using a memory card—it can be immediately viewed, processed, published, or printed.

A digital memory card holds many more images than the limited number of shots analog film allows, making it (theoretically) possible to simply keep shooting until you have captured the perfect picture. For analog photographers, more photos means more time and more money on film and processing. This apparent disadvantage can, however, make the photographer think harder about each individual shot and prevent excessive use of the shutter button. The compulsion to shoot the next free digital image can lead to hurried compositions. If they are not careful, digital photographers can easily end up producing a huge number of images of insufficient quality.

2.1.2 Resolution and Tonal Range

Today's digital image sensors provide higher resolution than analog film with the same format. Only large format sheet film cameras used in combination with high-quality digitizing processes can offer greater resolution and better detail rendition. The sheer number of pixels built into a digital image sensor means that you are virtually unlimited in the size of the prints you can make, especially if you consider that viewing distance normally increases with the size of a print anyway and that it is effectively impossible to perceive fine details—or the absence thereof—at these greater distances.

Things look rather different when it comes to reproducing the dynamic

range (i.e., the range of contrast) in a scene ([fig. 17](#)). Depending on the exposure metering setup and the equipment used, negative film can reproduce 12 stops or more of contrast and reacts less sensitively to critical, high-contrast situations. If you use a reputable photo lab that employs good development and scanning techniques, you will retain high-quality image data even after digitizing your images. Analog material also has fewer problems than digital capture techniques in potentially overexposed image areas, and tends not to produce the burned-out highlights common to digital image sensors. Digital photographers have to pay more attention than their analog counterparts to lighting conditions and exposure settings, or they can alternatively play it safe by shooting a bracketed sequence and merging the exposures later during photo editing ([section 3.9.5](#)).



Fig. 17: The limited dynamic range that digital cameras (especially digital compacts) can reproduce has caused burned-out highlights in the sky (shown at top). These areas contain virtually no image data that can be rescued during processing. A camera with greater dynamic range (due to a larger and/or higher quality sensor) reacts better in this type of high-contrast situation and gives the photographer more room to maneuver during subsequent image processing (shown at bottom).



Fig. 18: Analog film grain

Nowadays, some medium format digital backs and some high-quality digital cameras (especially those that feature a full-frame image sensor) are capable of reproducing 11 or 12 stops of contrast at low ISO values, and are thus rapidly catching up with the equivalent analog processes. Skillful use of RAW processing tools (section 4.1.1) can also help to recover details that initially appear lost in under- or overexposed image areas without dramatically reducing image quality.

Because maximum reproducible dynamic range is directly related to the size of each pixel in the sensor, cameras with considerably smaller sensors are only capable of reproducing up to nine stops of contrast.



Fig. 19: Typical digital color noise

2.1.3 Image Noise and the “Look” of an Image

Compared directly, digital images appear much less noisy than digitized analog images taken at the same ISO sensitivity. While analog film grain usually appears as uniform background noise ([fig. 18](#)), digital cameras set to high ISO values tend to produce blotchy color noise ([fig. 19](#)) alongside the more common luminance noise, and banding ([fig. 20](#)) in darker images areas. These digital artifacts are generally considered to be more distracting than analog grain effects. Therefore, most digital cameras have noise reduction algorithms built into their firmware, although this usually causes a loss of detail definition when it is switched on.



Fig. 20: Striped noise artifacts—an effect also known as banding

Noise (or a lack thereof) is a relative notion that very much depends on the individual viewer's perception, and which is often overstated when judging the quality of an image. Analog grain and digital noise are both much less irritating when viewed in a print or at reduced size on a website than when judged at 100 percent magnification on a computer monitor.

Many people consider analog images to look somehow more natural and harmonious than their often slightly sterile or artificial-looking digital counterparts. This is partly because the random arrangement of the silver halide crystals in analog film more closely represents the chaos present in nature than the strict, geometrical arrangement of pixels in an image sensor. Many analog photographers use the grain present in high-sensitivity films deliberately as a stylistic device, and there are a number of software manufacturers who offer programs and plug-ins that digitally simulate the

look of analog film material.

2.1.4 Image Artifacts

For technical reasons, digital image sensors produce a number of types of artifacts that confront photographers under various circumstances.

Moirés (fig. 21) occur where patterns intersect and cause interference. These appear in digital images when fine textures in the subject interfere with the pattern of pixels on the surface of the image sensor. Bayer Pattern sensors (page 17) also produce additional **False Color**, due to the necessity of interpolating color values from neighboring pixels (fig. 22). The geometric patterns created by the arrangement of the pixels on the sensor also cause so-called **aliasing** artifacts, which take the form of zigzag (or staircase) patterns in diagonal lines (fig. 23). To counteract these effects, camera manufacturers often insert multi-layered low-pass filters in front of the camera's sensor. Simply put, these filters apply a soft focus effect to the incident light, which reduces the strength of the effects described above. This causes a reduction in image detail and the maximum sharpness the sensor can reproduce.

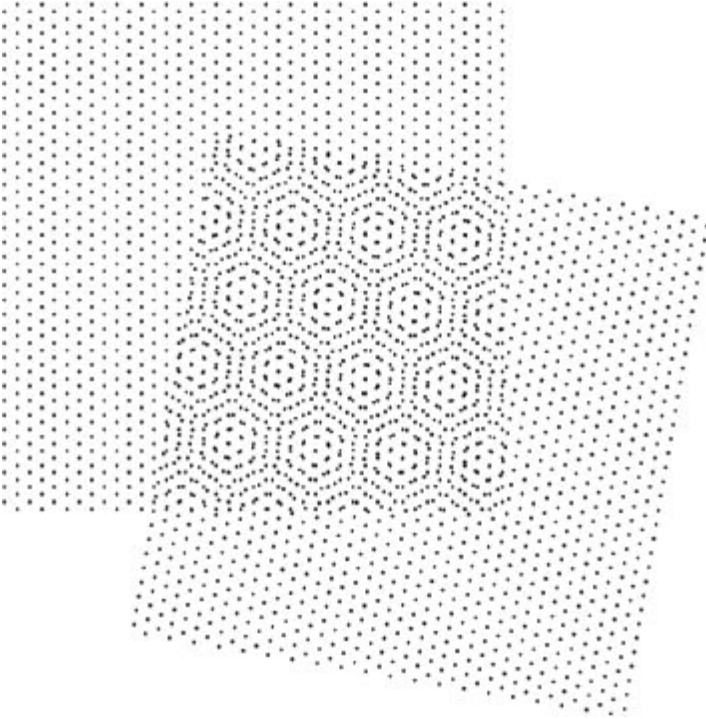


Fig. 21: Moiré artifacts caused by superimposing two patterns

Camera manufacturers are constantly striving to develop systems that produce the best possible compromise between image sharpness and the incidence of digital artifacts. Meanwhile, there are some (mostly professional) camera models on the market that deliberately do not include low-pass filters to avoid the resulting loss in sharpness. Nature photographers, for example, whose images document fine organic patterns and textures, benefit from capturing the utmost detail resolution and therefore may choose to use cameras without low-pass filters. Conversely, for architectural photography, low-pass filters help to avoid patterns and artifacts in building structures, which are very difficult to correct afterward, so this benefit heavily outweighs the modest gains in sharpness when not using a low-pass filter.



Fig. 22: False Color artifacts may appear in the form of colorful stripes that aren't actually present in the subject

Because the silver halide crystals in analog film are of varying sizes and are arranged randomly, these problems do not occur in analog images. Another reason for the lack of artifacts in analog images is that, in contrast to the pixels in the widely used Bayer Pattern image sensors, the crystals in color film are arranged on multiple layers, rather than on a single flat plane.



Fig. 23: “Staircase” aliasing artifacts

In spite of their built-in ultrasonic dust-removal mechanisms, digital cameras with interchangeable lenses are prone to getting dust and dirt stuck inside the camera body. Particles of dust that settle on the image sensor often produce obvious blotches, especially in images taken using small apertures ([fig. 24](#)). The best way to avoid this problem is to clean your sensor manually, even if this does involve quite a lot of effort. Make sure you use the proper tools when cleaning your sensor if you want to avoid damaging it permanently, or have it cleaned professionally.



Fig. 24: A dust particle on an image sensor

Although dust or hair that sticks to analog film is simply wound on with the film, analog photographers still have to make sure there is no dust on the original or the scanner when digitizing their images, and the first processing step after scanning large format negatives is often dust artifact removal. Therefore, modern scanners for 35mm films and slides usually have automatic dust and scratch correction software built in.

2.1.5 Lens Quality

The rapid development of image sensors in recent years has seen a parallel increase in the demands made on camera lenses. High-resolution digital sensors react more acutely than film not only to the quality and optical design of a lens, but also to the angle of incidence of the light reaching them. Light that hits film at an angle produces no specific problems (e.g., color shifts or lens casts), but in the case of digital sensors, light entering at an angle increases the risk of artifacts and vignetting, especially at the edges of the light-sensitive area. This effect is particularly prevalent when using wide-angle lenses due to the special nature of their optical construction and the flat angles at which incident light can pass through the lens and strike the sensor.

Retrofocus lenses, such as those often encountered with DSLRs, have highly complex optical constructions. You can easily recognize them because the aperture looks noticeably narrower when viewed from the front than it does when viewed from the back. Retrofocus lenses are less susceptible to vignetting and color shifts because of the substantial distance between the rear lens element and the image sensor. In contrast, perfectly or nearly symmetrical lenses, which are often found in view cameras or rangefinder cameras, have a much simpler optical design and accordingly are more compact, and they produce fewer aberrations and less pronounced distortions. On the other hand, the narrow gap between the rear lens element and the image sensor can be a problem, and this is especially true of wide-angle lenses, because the incident light can strike outside regions of the sensor at very flat angles. The result is a marked vignetting, especially seen with technical cameras, which is why you will often see photographers who are shooting with short focal lengths using a center filter to compensate for the light falloff at the outside of the image (without harming image quality).

Color shifts are another potential consequence of having the rear lens close to the sensor. Such shifts occur near the edges of an image when using wide-angle lenses and high-resolution digital backs (or when adapting a foreign lens from a rangefinder camera to a mirrorless camera). These color shifts can be corrected only with the involved process of using a so-called LCC (lens cast calibration) image. An LCC image can be created by holding an opaque filter, such as a milky pane of glass or a white balance filter, in front of the camera and then using the resulting exposure to correct the original image in a photo-editing program. This process effectively removes color casts, light fall-off, and even dust particles, if necessary, but not without some loss in image quality.

Nowadays, camera manufacturers design and build their lenses specifically to avoid these various artifacts. In other words, all newer lenses are constructed with the requirements of digital cameras in mind. Many sensor manufacturers now use microlenses or concentrator lenses positioned in front of the individual pixels in the sensor to direct the incident light to the light-sensitive part of the pixel. For some combinations of cameras and lenses, it is even possible to use software algorithms to eliminate some artifacts in-camera immediately after a shot has been taken.

Bayer Pattern Sensors and Interpolation

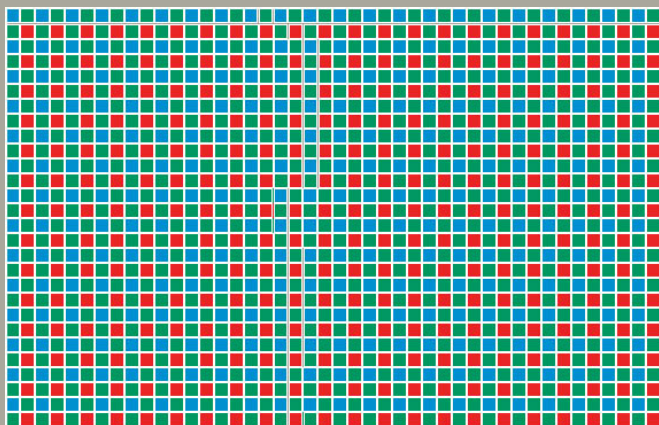
The pixels in an image sensor capture the brightness, not the color, of the individual points in a subject. To create a color image from the data captured by its image sensor, a digital camera has to produce red, green and blue color values for each pixel. The RGB color model uses different brightnesses of these three primary colors to reproduce virtually all colors that occur in nature.

Various techniques are used to convert the data captured by image sensors into color images, all of which use colored filters to create color data from the light entering the lens. So-called “multi-shot” cameras shoot three separate images of the subject and position either a red, green, or blue filter in front of the sensor while doing so. The resulting images are then merged into a single full-color image.

Conventional DSLRs have to make do with a single shot in which each pixel can capture the brightness of just one of the

subject's three color components—the other two are then created using a simple trick. The sensor pixels are coated with a matrix of red, green, and blue microfilters, and the two missing color values for each pixel are then calculated on the basis of the colors captured by neighboring pixels. This process is called interpolation.

The most widely used filter matrix pattern is the Bayer Pattern, which consists of 50 percent green and 25 percent red and blue filters. These are arranged in groups of four pixels, each of which consists of two green, one red, and one blue pixel. This predominance of green reflects the physiology and sensitivity of the human eye. The use of neighboring pixels during interpolation ensures that each pixel in the converted color image contains color data that is not actually captured by the corresponding sensor pixel.



The arrangement of microfilters in a Bayer Pattern sensor

2.1.6 Digital Image Processing

In contrast to analog images, all digital image-processing techniques can be applied to digital images in the course of a computer-based workflow without the risk of image quality loss. Shooting in extreme situations suddenly becomes a lot easier when armed with the knowledge that most artifacts, anomalies, and distortion can be corrected later on a computer. Computer-based image processing is of central importance to architectural photographers, and new techniques such as panorama stitching (section

4.4) and high dynamic range imaging (HDRI) (section 4.5), give us a completely new view of our subject and make shooting in cramped spaces or under extreme lighting conditions easier than ever before (fig. 25).



Fig. 25: This room interior features dramatically varied levels of brightness. Use of a bracketed sequence and post-processing helped manage this potential problem [focal length: 17mm, 0.5 – 1/60 sec. at f/11 and ISO 100].

2.1.7 Image Authenticity

Because of the difficulties involved in manipulating images captured on negative or slide film, they are often thought to be more authentic than digital images. Most people wouldn't consider a digital image to be particularly well protected against forgery, as it is not a unique original, but is instead an endlessly reproducible and manipulable collection of bits and bytes. Nevertheless a new form of digital image forensics that concerns itself with the evaluation of the authenticity of digital images has emerged. The primary goal of image forensics is to determine the origin of particular images, but the field also concerns itself with the detection of any form of manipulation to the digital image files. Digital image forensic scientists develop various algorithmic methods and processes for determining when it is highly likely that alterations to an image have been made after the fact—but only when the picture at hand has a sufficient resolution with minimal

compression artifacts present. In many cases, the traces of manipulation are eliminated when pictures are dramatically reduced in size, as is often the case for JPEGs widely circulated on the Internet.

2.1.8 Archiving Images

Film may have a greater claim to authenticity, but digital photography has many advantages when it comes to image archiving: It's not as easy to accidentally lose a digital original because digital technology makes it possible to save, copy, and archive your images losslessly and, theoretically, forever. However, digital archiving must be planned and executed properly to avoid losing irrecoverable data. As a rule of thumb, files should be backed up in at least two separate physical locations. It's all too common that data stored in only one location ends up getting lost because physical drives are susceptible to faults in reliability. In addition, various other threats ranging from material defect, to water damage, to heat, to strong magnetic fields can be enough to damage or completely destroy data files. Even the reputed external RAID-1 or RAID-5 systems, which automatically mirror files on two or more distinct drives, are not sufficient enough on their own for a sound digital backup process. These systems may be effective against single drive failures, but they don't offer protection against software malfunctions, defective RAID controllers, viruses, or accidental deletion. Burglary, fire, and flood are other threats that justify archiving your files in two physically separate locations. Based on your preferences, you can store your duplicated files at a friend's house, in a safe deposit box, or in the cloud using an online data backup service.

2.2 The Camera

A camera has been the photographer's primary tool for more than 150 years. This device is designed to depict everything within a certain angle of view in three-dimensional space and to capture it for posterity in two dimensions. Different types of cameras are suitable for different types of photography, and certain functions and capabilities determine whether a particular camera is suited to the field of architectural photography.

So which camera is best for the job? You will see in the following sections that this is less a question of brand and more one of system type and sensor format.

2.2.1 Types of Digital Cameras

The cameras available for shooting architectural photos range from normal compacts with tiny image sensors, through full-frame analog or digital cameras, right up to analog large-format models.

Digital Compacts and Bridge Cameras

The smallest image sensors available today are built into **digital compact cameras**. These cameras are small and light and are therefore easy to carry. They are also simple to use, even for beginners. They are best suited for everyday snapshots.

Sensor size and efficiency: The greatest disadvantage of digital compacts is their tiny sensors. Large numbers of pixels packed into such a small space provide a relatively low light yield per pixel, making it necessary to artificially amplify the signals the sensor produces. This in turn reduces the dynamic range and increases the background noise in the resulting images. Noise is then combated in-camera at the cost of a further reduction in image detail.

Fixed lenses: The small, fixed lenses built into digital compacts tend to produce a relatively large number of lens errors, especially toward the edges of the frame and especially for lenses with a large zoom range or particularly compact dimensions. Fixed lenses also have a limited range of focal lengths, especially at the wide-angle end of the scale. This makes digital compacts particularly unsuitable for use in an architectural context.

Other features of digital compacts: Composition is made difficult by small viewfinders and small, glossy monitors. The manual or semi-automatic exposure modes that are so important in architectural photography are rarely found or are difficult to handle in compacts. The lack of a RAW shooting mode (section 4.1.1) is also a serious handicap.

Although they look a lot more like DSLRs, so-called **bridge cameras** are subject to many of the same drawbacks as compacts, including small sensor size and limited wide-angle capabilities. But, unlike compacts, most bridge cameras support RAW image data formats and often have manual or semi-

automatic exposure modes.

Four Thirds, APS-C, and DX DSLRs

Most DSLRs have sensors that are significantly smaller than the traditional 35mm image format (fig. 26), often due to the simple fact that smaller sensors are cheaper to produce.

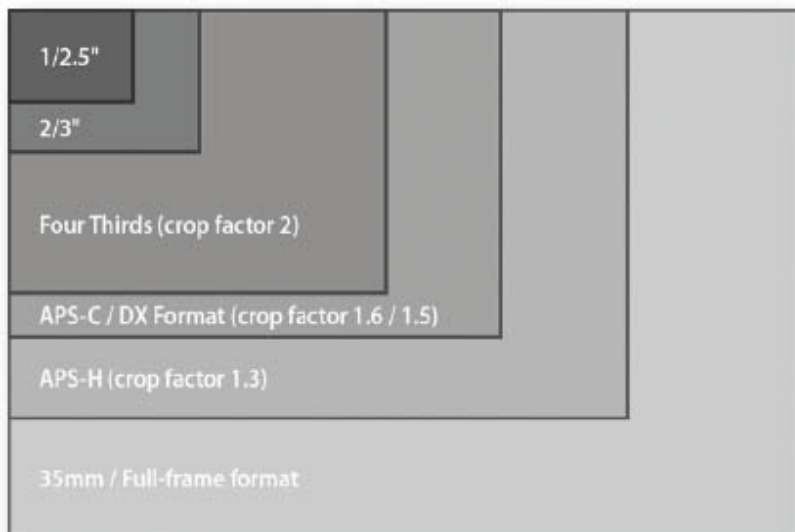


Fig. 26: The relative sizes of various digital image sensor formats compared with the traditional 35mm/full-frame format

The smallest DSLR sensors were built to the **Four Thirds** standard developed by Olympus and Kodak. These had a diagonal measurement about half the size of a 35mm film frame and a corresponding crop factor (or focal length multiplier) of 2. This factor is a conceptual value aimed at helping the photographer to estimate the angle of view a lens will produce relative to the size of a 35mm frame. A 14mm lens used on a Four Thirds camera will depict an angle of view equivalent to that produced by a 28mm lens used with a full-frame camera. The focal length itself doesn't change, and the equivalent focal length is calculated by multiplying the real focal length of the lens by the crop factor (in this case, $14\text{mm} \times 2 = 28$). A newer system, the Micro Four Thirds system, uses the same sensor, but removes

the mirror box from the camera design (see mirrorless cameras, [page 25](#)).

Compared with the Four Thirds standard, the **APS-C format** used by Nikon (**DX** format), Pentax, Sony, and others has a crop factor of about 1.5, while the APS-C format used by Canon has a crop factor of about 1.6.

Due to the significantly smaller image circle they have to cover, APS-C, DX, and Four Thirds lenses are more compact and lighter than their full-frame cousins ([fig. 27](#)).

Sensor size and light yield: The pixels in these types of sensors are distributed over a much larger area than those found in digital compacts, which means that each individual pixel is larger and can capture more light. This gives us greater dynamic range and better detail resolution in the resulting images. Today's multi-megapixel sensors and high-end lenses virtually guarantee high-quality images that are perfect for subsequent computer-based perspective correction.

Viewfinder image and live view: The large, bright viewfinders built into most DSLRs make composing architectural photos a lot easier, even in difficult lighting conditions. Unlike the optical viewfinders built into compact cameras, the mirror system ensures that you see exactly the same image in the viewfinder as the one that will be captured by the sensor. But be warned, some entry-level cameras don't have a 100 percent viewfinder image, which means that the photo you capture will actually be slightly larger than the visible frame. Live view is now virtually standard in all DSLRs and is a great aid to manual focusing, especially when coupled with a magnifier function that enlarges a selected portion of the image on the monitor. Live view is especially useful if you are using manual lenses, and it often includes live histogram functionality, which simplifies the selection of appropriate exposure settings.

Disadvantages of image sensor size: The general focal length shift toward the telephoto end of the scale caused by the crop factor is a welcome bonus for sports and wildlife photographers, but creates new challenges for architectural photographers. Full-frame tilt/shift lenses (section 2.3.3) lose their wide angle of view when used in conjunction with smaller sensors, making them less useful than their designers intended. The same is true of many high-end, wide-angle lenses that are relegated to the role of standard lenses by the crop factor. Nevertheless, the enormous range of interchangeable lenses available today ensures that you will usually be able

to find a lens that suits your purposes—a huge advantage over fixed-lens cameras.

Conclusions: Despite some limitations, APS-C, DX, and Four Thirds DSLRs used with wide-angle lenses are perfectly adequate in a range of situations and are a good choice for photographers who want to pursue architectural photography at a hobby level without making a large investment in specialized equipment.

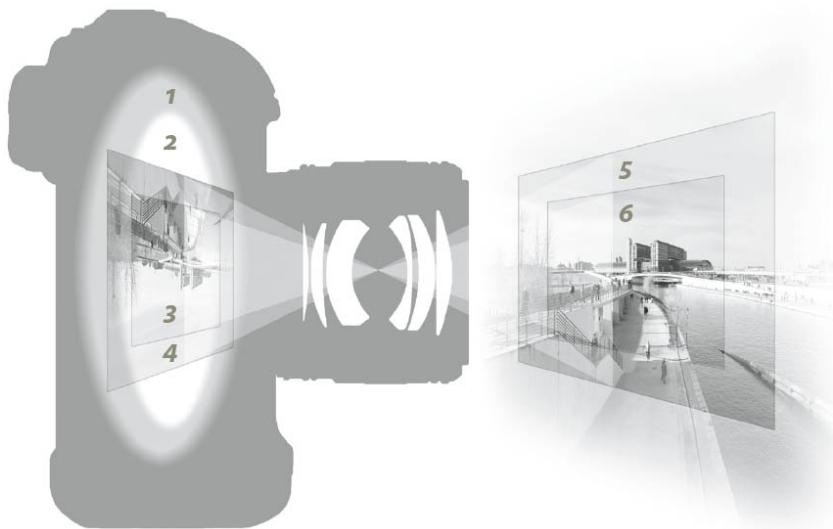


Fig. 27

1 Full-frame (35mm) image circle

2 APS-C image circle

3 Full-frame image sensor

4 APS-C image sensor

5 Full-frame image area

6 APS-C image area

Analog and Digital Full-Frame Cameras

The 35mm analog format: Fixed, non-wide-angle lenses make analog 35mm compact cameras completely unsuitable for architectural photography, so they do not form part of our overall considerations. In contrast, in spite of the cost of buying, processing, and digitizing the photographic film, analog SLR cameras are a workable option for taking architectural photos. The unique look of analog images is often a welcome change for photographers who have hitherto only taken and processed digital photos.

The digital full-frame format: In the digital sector, manufacturers including Canon, Sony, and Nikon all offer full-frame (or FX) format DSLRs with sensors that are the same size as a traditional 35mm film frame. The 1:1 focal length equivalence means that you don't have to get used to dealing with crop factors and equivalent focal lengths, and you can use tilt/shift lenses with their intended angles of view (section 2.3.3). Please note: all lenses that are not explicitly built for use with full-frame cameras (Canon EF-S, Nikon/Tokina DX, Sigma DC, Sony DT, and Tamron Di II), can only be used with full-frame cameras under certain circumstances. Some optical elements in non-full-frame lenses protrude too far into the camera's mirror box, and the smaller image circles they produce usually cause severe vignetting (fig. 27).

The viewfinder image: Larger image sensors require the use of larger reflex mirrors and viewfinder prisms, usually resulting in a large, bright viewfinder image that, in combination with a physical or virtual grid pattern, makes precise image composition much easier.

Sensor size and light yield: The size of each individual pixel in a full-frame sensor is significantly greater than that found in APS-C, DX, or Four Thirds sensors (fig. 28), which improves the reproducible dynamic range, noise characteristics, and basic per-pixel sharpness.

Disadvantages of the full-frame format: The full use of the image circle means that lens errors occurring toward the edges of the frame are more obvious, especially when you shoot at wide angles and/or at a wide aperture. These take on the form of distortion, vignetting, chromatic aberrations, or blurred details (fig. 37). To get the best out of a large sensor, it is recommended that you use the best quality lenses you can afford. Because full-frame sensors are expensive to produce, cameras

incorporating them are also more expensive than models that use smaller sensors. If you are on a limited budget, it therefore makes more sense to use a less expensive camera with a smaller sensor and spend more on your lenses than it does to use an expensive full-frame camera with low-quality lenses.

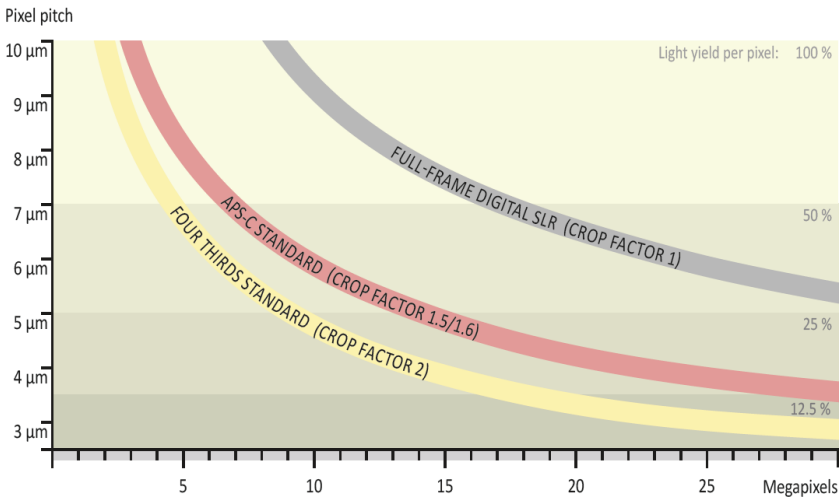


Fig. 28: Comparison of pixel sizes: light yield per pixel



Fig. 29: Dispensing with the space required for a reflex mirror allows for adapting practically any nonsystem lens on a digital mirrorless camera

Conclusions: If the quality of the lenses you use matches that of the camera, a full-frame DSLR is an ideal tool for architectural photography. The best models with very high pixel counts can even compete with digital medium format backs.

Mirrorless Cameras

A relatively new camera class is composed of **digital mirrorless cameras** capable of having their lenses swapped out but with a mirrorless design. These cameras dispense with the tilted mirror (and its swinging motion) that one finds in SLRs, allowing for a compact construction while still being able to produce an image quality on par with DSLRs, and they have

sensor sizes that are comparable to those of the SLRs (fig. 29). Because the range of sensor sizes in this camera class varies so dramatically, however, not every mirrorless camera can be recommended for architectural photography. You generally should avoid using models with sensors smaller than the Micro Four Thirds standard (e.g., the CX format from Nikon with its crop factor of 2.7), opting instead to use cameras with larger sensor options, such as those with APS-C format or full-frame sensors. The big advantage of cameras in this class is they feature dramatically smaller flange focal distances (section 2.5.7) because of their mirrorless construction, which means practically any nonsystem lenses are at your disposal with the right adapter. When you do adapt lenses in this manner, though, take care to ensure that the lens in use has an aperture ring or that the adapter is capable of electronically relaying the exposure instructions from the camera to the lens.

Of course, these cameras also have their drawbacks: Mirrorless cameras lack the optical viewfinder that allows photographers to inspect the image area as is possible with standard DSLRs. Without this tool, you have to consult the camera display when setting up your shot, which can be difficult on sun-flooded afternoons, or you can use the electronic viewfinder, if your camera has this feature. These options are limited by the sensor's dynamic range, of course, but they also have potential advantages: a histogram can be superimposed on the live view and dark viewfinders don't pose a problem because they can be electronically amplified and brightened. Furthermore, an electronic viewfinder presents the image exactly as it will ultimately be captured. Its live view, in other words, reflects the current white balance, for example, or any manual exposure settings. Cameras in this class tend to have a slightly slower autofocus, but that isn't usually a critical issue for architecture photography. Finally, the compact construction of these cameras can make them harder to handle and you have to be careful to avoid inadvertent movements while shooting. Users may find them less ergonomic owing to their smaller size, their fewer and smaller knobs and dials that can be difficult to reach, and the awkward balance caused by attaching a heavy lens to a light camera body.

Analog and Digital Medium Format Cameras

Medium format cameras have always been less common in an architectural photography context than they are in studio or fashion photography. This is primarily due to the fact that the construction of large format cameras

makes them better for correcting perspective errors than their medium format cousins.

Analog medium format cameras use roll film (the most common is the 120 film format) with a larger surface area per frame than 35mm (full-frame) cameras (fig. 30), resulting in a kind of reverse crop factor. Classic film formats range from 6 x 4.5 cm to 6 x 9 cm. For example, a 35mm medium format lens covers an angle of view that is equivalent to ultra-wide-angle for a full-frame camera. Compared with 35mm film, the increased surface area of medium format stock improves potential detail resolution and overall image quality. But again, these advantages are gained at the price of increased material, processing, and digitizing costs. Medium format cameras are usually constructed in module form and consist of a mirror box, waist-level or pentaprism viewfinder, film holder (or back), and a lens. In contrast to 35mm cameras, most medium format models are fully manual, although increasing numbers of autofocus models are beginning to appear. Because they are heavier, slower, and less flexible to use, medium format cameras are hardly ever used for action, sports, or wildlife photography. Studio and landscape photography, conversely, is where these cameras show their strengths.

Ultra-high-resolution **digital backs** for medium format cameras, designed to be used in lieu of film, have been around for a while now. Today, many systems are designed strictly for digital-only uses, such as those from Hasselblad (fig. 31) or Phase One. Image sensors in digital backs range from being one and a half times bigger than full-frame sensors on the smaller end to double the size on larger end. You use a divisor of 1.27–1.56 depending on the model at hand to find the 35mm equivalent; in other words, the diagonal sensor length of a full-frame camera sensor is proportionally smaller based on this conversion value. As far as dimensions go, the largest digital medium-format sensors are comparable to “small” 6 x 4.5 cm medium format film, but still noticeably smaller than the dimensions you would find at the larger end of the medium format film world, such as in Hasselblad’s V or Mamiya’s RB/RZ series. Accordingly, the sensor captures only a fraction of the circular image area theoretically available from the medium format lens.

Modern digital cameras in this class come equipped with autofocus capabilities, but the speed of these systems is not comparable to what you find with standard full-frame cameras. There are excellent lenses with outstanding optical performance capable of providing exacting digital sensors with the finest of details across the entire image area. But the few

wide-angle lenses often reveal various weaknesses such as pronounced field curvature and edge blurring with these cameras. Because of this particular deficiency and the lack of ability to use tilt/shift lenses, many architectural photographers opt for different camera systems, such as a technical camera.

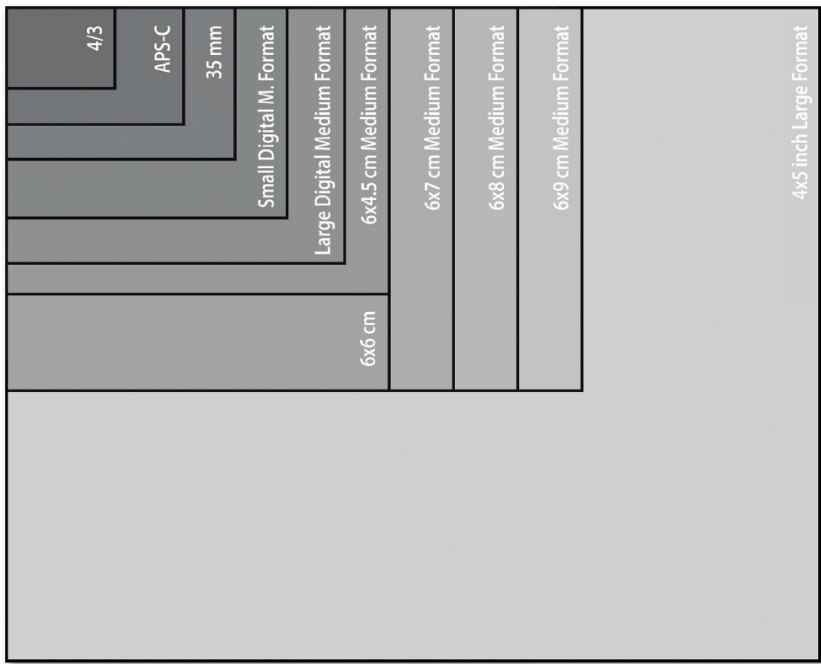


Fig. 30: Image sensor and film formats shown to scale



Fig. 31: A medium format digital camera

Large Format Cameras

Around since the mid 1800's, **large format analog cameras** have no digital equivalent. They still represent the crème de la crème in the architectural photography arena and are also still used in product and advertising photography. They work on a principle that is almost as old as photography itself. These specialist tools are usually mounted on an optical bench or monorail ([fig. 32](#)) and are perfect for making perspective adjustments to an image during composition. The purely manual approach required when using large format cameras makes them much more time-consuming than other systems. They possess neither automatic exposure metering nor autofocus and their skilled use mirrors the skills required of a photographer 100 years ago. However, this lack of flexibility plays only a secondary role in the context of architectural photography because the extremely high resolution and wide angles of view are unparalleled. One of the major drawbacks of large format work is the high cost of film and processing, which can cost \$50 and more for a single exposure.



Fig. 32: An analog large format camera

Digital sensors in large format sizes are practically unheard-of due to the astronomical costs involved and the virtually nonexistent market. Nevertheless, it is possible to attach some medium format digital backs to large format **technical cameras**. Smaller manufacturers such as Alpa, Arca-Swiss, and Cambo produce high-end cameras for this niche market, which are capable of being paired with technical lenses from Schneider-Kreuznach or Rodenstock. Using this setup requires the use of ultra-wide-angle lenses when shooting architectural photos, though, because the sensor area is so small in relation. Such lenses have focal lengths from 35mm

(24mm full-frame equivalent) to ultra-wide 23mm. For lenses with focal lengths of less than 35mm, the narrow image circle no longer allows you to make effective perspective corrections using shift movements. One disadvantage to using these wide-angle lenses, which have nearly symmetric constructions, is that it's impossible to get around needing to use a center filter and needing to always expose additional LCC images as a matter of regular practice because pronounced vignetting and color shifts are unavoidable. These cameras are definitely not suitable for working quickly on location. Without any sort of distance or exposure metering, photographers are completely dependent on their own experience or external tools such as laser distance meters and light meters. The live view available on modern digital backs compensates for the lack of an optical viewfinder. Other less precise alternatives include external attachment viewfinders ([fig. 34](#)) or special mounts that can hold smartphones equipped with special optics run by apps that integrate with the camera to simulate a viewfinder image with an image border ([fig. 33](#)).



Fig. 33: Digital technical camera with a special smartphone attachment to serve as a view-finder

Again, for completeness's sake, I feel I should mention **scanning backs**, which, when inserted into a large format camera like a film holder, capture the image line by line like a scanner. Needless to say, the lighting conditions and the subject mustn't change during the scanning process, which is why this technique is used only for scientific or art reproduction purposes, and even those applications are becoming less common.



Fig. 34: The ALPA 12 FPS is a shutter module that can function as an independent camera when connected to a back, a lens, and the appropriate adapters



Fig. 35: A camera platform capable of allowing the pairing of a digital medium-format back with, for example, a full-frame shift lens

Conclusions: Digital large format architectural photography, too, has its drawbacks. The sophisticated capture methods result in extremely high quality images but at a great expense of time invested. Then there's also the very high costs of equipment, which can be difficult even for professional photographers to justify. Many professional architectural photographers who use digital technical cameras also regularly use standard full-frame digital cameras as an additional tool. The future prevalence of technical cameras in the architectural arena depends on this competition from full-frame devices that, by comparison, are relatively affordable yet still deliver great image quality. For the large-format class to establish a firm foothold, the development of affordable digital backs with large medium-format sensors, higher resolution, a very large dynamic range, and better image quality at high ISO values is needed. Another helpful development would be new lenses—especially in the wide-angle range—designed specifically for digital sensors that allow for significant adjustment without vignetting or color shifts. Additional innovative developments similar to the ALPA 12 FPS (fig. 34) or the HCam-B1 would also go a long way in attracting

professional architectural photographers. These cameras have a focal-plane shutter, which renders the use of leaf-shutter lenses unnecessary, meaning you can combine powerful digital backs with a seemingly endless range of lenses, from technical to medium-format to full-frame lenses with a large image area (such as shift lenses). This is how a digital back can be paired up with, for example, the Canon TS-E 17mm 1:4L shift lens designed for digital full-frame cameras (fig. 35), resulting in previously unthinkable angles of view for digital medium-format equipment.

2.2.2 Conclusions Regarding Cameras

The considerations detailed above show that there is no ideal choice of camera for use in architectural photography, and every system has its strengths and weaknesses. Professionals are still hoping that a flexible, large format digital solution will be developed—one that approximates the quality of comparable analog cameras but are much easier to use. For now, some pros continue to use large format film which they later digitize, others use technical cameras with digital backs, and yet others use full-frame digital cameras with tilt/shift lenses or correcting perspective and converging verticals using image processing software. Currently, full-frame digital is the most flexible system available for shooting photos of buildings. It fulfills all of the genre's basic requirements regarding sensor size, dynamic range, availability of wide-angle lenses, manual exposure settings, viewfinder quality, low running costs, etc. For hobbyists and advanced photographers on a budget, DSLRs with smaller sensors are a useful, lower-priced alternative. Mirrorless cameras are the best bet for anyone whose top concern is minimizing heavy or cumbersome gear. Analog SLRs still have their devotees too, although today, it is virtually impossible to use the resulting images without digitizing them first. One thing is certain: digital and analog compact cameras are not suitable for architectural photography, as they offer neither wide-angle lenses nor sufficient image quality and handling flexibility (fig. 36).



Fig. 36: Keeping a small, high-quality compact camera on hand for the occasional snapshot is always a good idea, even though it's no substitute for more advanced equipment

2.3 Lenses

The lens you use largely determines the angle of view you can capture, the sharpness of detail, the minimum depth of field in your image, the possible shutter speed, and the degree to which lens errors are visible in the finished image. In short, the lens dictates image quality. If weaknesses in the construction of the lens mean that certain details don't reach the sensor, these simply cannot be captured. Most currently available analog and digital SLR bodies are suited to architectural use, but more care is required when choosing a lens.

While sports photographers require long telephoto lenses with fast autofocus, and portrait photographers prefer medium telephotos with good detail definition at wide apertures, a lens that is to be used for architectural photography has to provide extremely good reproduction characteristics, an appropriate angle of view, and the ability to tilt and/or shift.

2.3.1 Reproduction Characteristics

Architectural photography requires the use of lenses that provide consistent reproduction with minimum lens errors and anomalies ([fig. 37](#)).

The large size of the subject, the wide angles of view, and the relatively large subject distances mean that selective focus doesn't play a significant role in our considerations. Especially when shooting for documentary purposes, architectural photographers need to be sure that the entire subject is captured in sharp detail. For this reason, we often shoot with the lens stopped right down—a technique that also reduces vignetting effects, chromatic aberration (color fringing), and softness at the edges of the frame. Fringing and some softness are almost impossible to completely avoid, even at very small apertures. While chromatic aberration can be effectively counteracted using software tools, the edges of photos often remain less sharp than the center, especially if they were shot using cheap or mid-range lenses. The distortion that a lens produces is independent of the aperture you use, and both barrel and pincushion distortion are more evident at the extreme wide-angle and telephoto ends of the zoom scale. It is therefore important to compose your image with enough space around the subject to allow effective subsequent distortion correction.



Fig. 37: Lens errors (from top to bottom): Vignetting, chromatic aberration, edge softness, barrel distortion

It is often said that the simpler optical construction of fixed focal length lenses generally produces better image quality than more complex zooms. This is, however, not always true, especially if we compare the image quality produced by older, analog fixed focal length lenses with that produced by newer zooms that are designed specifically for use with digital cameras, but only if the range covered by the zoom is not too extreme.

As long as the lens produces results of adequate quality, it is immaterial whether you use a fixed focal length or a zoom to take architectural photos.

Price is often a good indicator of the quality you can expect to achieve; more expensive lenses are often constructed with better optical quality than entry-level or mid-range lenses. Don't scrimp in the wrong place if you can help it: A cheaper camera with a more expensive lens is nearly always a better choice than the other way around.

2.3.2 Focal Length

In general, architectural photography requires the use of a range of wide-angle lenses that capture a greater angle of view than standard or telephoto lenses. This also means that objects appear smaller on the image sensor or film. Ultra-wide-angle lenses are those with an equivalent focal length of 24mm or less and an angle of view of more than 84 degrees ([fig. 38](#)).

If all buildings were constructed in an open environment with no interfering surroundings, we could, theoretically, take all of our architectural photos using one medium wide-angle lens. We could simply move around until we found the best possible viewpoint for a shot. However, in reality, the opposite is nearly always true, and the choice of places from which a building can be successfully photographed is extremely limited. Most of the buildings we want to photograph are located in densely developed urban environments, and we can only take photos from the surrounding streets and squares. Optimum shooting locations are often inaccessible. Additionally, street signs, lamps, and vehicles intrude on a composition, so it is important to be flexible in your approach. This often means moving closer to the subject and using a shorter focal length lens.

For exterior shots, we usually use lenses with focal lengths between 20 and 35mm ([fig. 39](#)), while interior situations normally require focal lengths between 14 and 24mm ([fig. 40](#)). A short telephoto lens is also a great additional tool for capturing details of a building or shooting from greater distances. A useful architectural photography kit will therefore include lenses ranging from ultra-wide-angle to medium telephoto. Ideally, you will also include a tilt/shift lens or two in the mix.



Fig. 38: 12mm full-frame, ultra-wide-angle interior shot

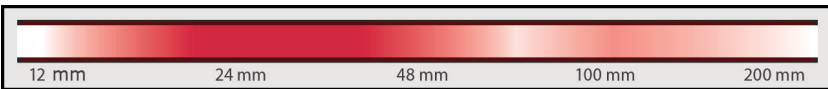


Fig. 39: The frequency of use of various focal lengths in exterior situations (full-frame equivalent)

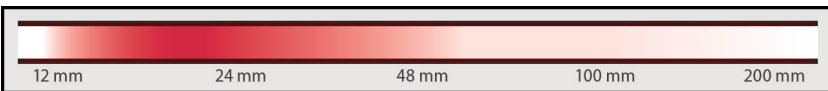


Fig.40: The frequency of use of various focal lengths in interior situations (full-frame equivalent)

2.3.3 Tilt/Shift Lenses

Tilt/shift lenses (fig. 41) allow the photographer to make physical adjustments to the perspective in an image while shooting. They can be used to prevent the occurrence of converging verticals (section 3.4) and

obviate the need for various quality-reducing correction steps during subsequent image processing (fig. 42). They also make it easier to compose images, as they give the photographer more freedom in the choice of viewpoint and framing. Tilt/shift lenses allow you to create perspective-corrected two- to four-shot panoramas with increased angles of view and resolution (section 3.6.3). Apart from aperture control, these lenses are usually fully manual and thus require you to select distance settings.



Fig. 41: A 17mm full-frame wide-angle tilt/shift lens



Fig. 42: Converging verticals in this scene were prevented by using a 17mm tilt/shift lens

2.4 The Perfect Camera/Lens Combination for Every Budget

Beginners: If you are a complete beginner, or if you are stepping up from a compact camera, an entry-level DSLR or a mirrorless camera in a bundle with a kit lens is a good starting point. All major manufacturers offer such kits for \$1000 or less, and they are a great way to take your first steps in architectural photography. Thanks to modular systems with interchangeable lenses, it is simple to upgrade your system later on.

Hobbyists: For photographers who want to deepen their experience of architectural photography, I recommend the purchase of an additional ultra-wide-angle zoom lens. These lenses generally cost around \$500 and open up a whole new world of possibilities, especially in interior situations.

Ambitious amateurs: If you are serious about coming to grips with architectural photography, you should get hold of a mid-range DSLR or

mirrorless camera, an ultra-wide-angle zoom lens, and a high-quality, mid-range zoom with a range that extends up to short telephoto. Selected fixed focal length lenses—one with a 35mm-equivalent focal length of 24mm, for example—are useful additions to a setup like this. But remember, you can easily spend \$2,500 or more kitting yourself out this way.

Semi-pro: Photographers who are already experienced in various areas and who want to progress in the architectural arena should consider acquiring a full-frame DSLR and a set of high-end zoom and fixed focal length lenses. A tilt/shift lens is also a useful addition to any full-frame kit, and a 24mm model is a good starting point. At this level, you can easily spend several thousand dollars on your equipment.

Professionals: For most pros, the best is just about good enough. This usually means large format cameras with medium format digital backs supplemented by a top-of-the-line, full-frame camera and high-end, wide-angle lenses. Most pros have one or more tilt/shift lenses with them at all times, and sometimes use shift adapters to combine medium format lenses with their everyday camera bodies. Here, the costs quickly reach five figures.

2.5Accessories

The requirements for every architectural photographer don't stop at just camera and lens—some accessories are essential while others simply make life a whole lot easier. The following sections describe some useful items you can add to your collection of gear.

2.5.1Tripod

A tripod is a fundamental part of every architectural photographer's kit ([fig. 43](#)). It is responsible for helping to deliver sharp, shake-free images, especially in low-light situations, whether indoors or out. But in daylight situations, too, gray filters and small apertures can increase shutter speeds to levels at which a tripod is indispensable. You can, of course, shoot handheld whenever circumstances allow, but remember that a tripod is also a great aid to aligning your camera ([page 38](#)), and the steady viewfinder

image a tripod-mounted camera delivers also helps when composing an image. Using a tripod, you have more time to make precise adjustments to your framing and to wait for the right moment to release the shutter. This way, you can simply wait until all the elements of your image (clouds, vehicles, passersby, etc.) are in the right positions and then release the shutter at leisure.



Fig. 43: A high-quality tripod is an essential tool for every architectural photographer

Always use a stable tripod and make sure that you are not using it to the

limits of its load capacity. If your camera is too heavy, even a light breeze can cause camera shake. Maximum mobility is not as important for architectural photographers as it is in other fields, so don't worry too much about the weight of your gear. I can recommend tripods made by Gitzo, Really Right Stuff, or Berlebach if you can afford them, or by Manfrotto if you are on slightly tighter budget.

While traditional tripods come in heights up to about 2 meters, super-high camera stands may be used for special circumstances in architectural photography, particularly to establish a shot by rising above a distracting object in your line of view or to create a perspective from a bird's-eye view. The maximum extension for medium models is in the 6 to 7 meter range and the tallest models range from 12 to 16 meters, or even taller yet. Super-high stands often feature a motorized pan/tilt head that can be controlled remotely from the ground. They tend to be difficult to transport due to their significant weight.



Fig. 44: A high-end ball head and quick-release plate mounted on a tripod

2.5.2 Tripod Head

The head you use is just as important as the tripod itself. Many heads are

available separately, making it easier to choose exactly the right model for your individual purposes. The two main types are ball heads ([fig. 44](#)) and 3-way pan/tilt heads ([fig. 45](#)), such as those controlled by gear mechanisms. Ball heads require the movement of just a single grip to move them in any direction and are consequently very quick to align. In contrast, pan/tilt and geared heads do not have the same agility and ease of use, but their separated planes of adjustment are more precise and allow the most miniscule adjustments. Gear-controlled heads, in particular, allow for the subtlest adjustments down to the millimeter; a level of control that is not possible to replicate on a ball head. As always, the system you prefer is a matter of personal taste. Recently, some hybrid tripod head models have emerged that combine the mechanisms of ball heads and gear-controlled pan/tilt heads to offer the best of both worlds ([fig. 46](#)).



Fig. 45: A premium pan/tilt tripod head with quick release plates



Fig. 46: A specialized tripod head that marries the control and advantages of a pan/tilt system with the flexibility of a ball head

As with your tripod, using an inferior-quality head can quickly cause frustration, especially if it slips once you have set it up. A ball head that you can't properly lock makes aligning your camera a game of chance, so avoid purchasing cheap tripod/head bundles if you can. The best tripod heads are manufactured by Arca Swiss, Linhof, Markins, and Really Right Stuff. Saving money by purchasing a low-quality tripod will only lead to an additional investment further down the line. Spending \$200 or more on a tripod and about \$150 on a high-quality head should ensure you years of trouble-free shooting. If this seems like a lot to you, just compare it with

the total cost of your other camera gear and view it as a long-term investment in your photographic future.

Quick-release plates and clamps (fig. 47) are a great option, and save a lot of time and effort when mounting and removing your camera from your tripod. Many tripods come with their own proprietary quick-release plate built in, although the Arca-Swiss system has become something of a standard in professional photographic circles.



Fig. 47: An Arca-Swiss compatible quick-release system atop a ball head

2.5.3L-Bracket and Panorama Head

For photographers who shoot a lot of portrait-format images, an L-bracket can also be a worthwhile investment. L-brackets are not cheap, but greatly simplify the switch from landscape to portrait format while keeping the center of gravity of the camera/lens combination directly above the center of the tripod (fig. 48). L-brackets are available in generic form or as custom models designed to keep the controls and contacts for specific camera models easy to access. Panorama enthusiasts require their own special panorama heads (or nodal point adapters as they are often called), which are designed to preserve perspective and simplify camera alignment while

shooting in the round.



Fig. 48: An L-bracket, custom designed for the camera body shown

2.5.4 Remote Release

Used in combination with a stable tripod and your camera's mirror lockup function, a remote release is the final link in the chain of tools that ensure shake-free photos. You need to be able to shoot perfectly superimposed source images to create effective high dynamic range (HDR) images (section 3.9.5), making a perfectly stable camera setup essential. Even pressing the shutter button can cause the camera to shift by a few pixels, which is where remote releases come into play. They are available in cable form or as radio and infrared controlled wireless versions, and some older SLR cameras even work with mechanical Bowden cables. Manufacturers' own remote releases are often more expensive than third-party solutions, although both are usually equally as good.

Camera Orientation

Orienting your camera perfectly atop a tripod involves making minor adjustments to the tripod head while carefully examining the picture frame, ideally by using the camera's viewfinder. One of the beauties of using a tripod is that it lets you focus entirely on your viewfinder image—everything outside of the image area can fall away. It's always advisable to use a grid-focusing screen, if available, or to activate your camera's digital gridlines to assist in precisely orienting your camera. These guiding lines make it much easier to capture the various straight lines in the exterior of a building, its windows and doorjambs, and even interior edges and corners at your desired orientation, making the entire composition process easier and reducing the time required for post-process corrections. If you're orienting your camera so that it's level, the integrated levels found on many tripod heads can be a big help in architectural photography in general, as well as when using a shift lens or when creating a panorama. Another useful method is to align the central horizontal gridline or the central measuring field in the viewfinder with the horizon line. If the horizon line is not visible in your photo, you can substitute various architectural elements of your subject that are located at the same height as the camera (= on the horizon). Doors are particularly useful for this because they generally stand out and they provide photographers with a strong sense of the dimensions and scale of the subject. A panning clamp on top of the tripod head can be particularly helpful for horizontal panning. If your camera is not level but is instead tilted slightly up or down, a panning base, as you often see with ball mounts, makes panning the camera sideways easier (in which case the tripod should be positioned as straight as possible).

If you don't have a remote release on hand, you can also use your camera's self-timer function to release the shutter without touching the camera. The disadvantage of this approach is that you cannot precisely determine when the shutter fires. Many wireless remote releases send an additional focus command to the lens before firing the shutter, so if you want to be sure that your focus setting stays put, you should deactivate autofocus before taking

your shot.

There are various other options for controlling your camera remotely via cable or wireless connection to a tablet, smartphone, or radio release trigger. These systems have several exposure modes such as interval or time-lapse exposures, or even motion detection. Some systems are capable of streaming the camera's live view over a smartphone and enabling the photographer to adjust focus, shutter speed, aperture, ISO, white balance, exposure compensation, and so on even while at a significant distance from the camera ([fig. 49](#)). Controlling these settings remotely is extremely helpful when working with a high camera stand.

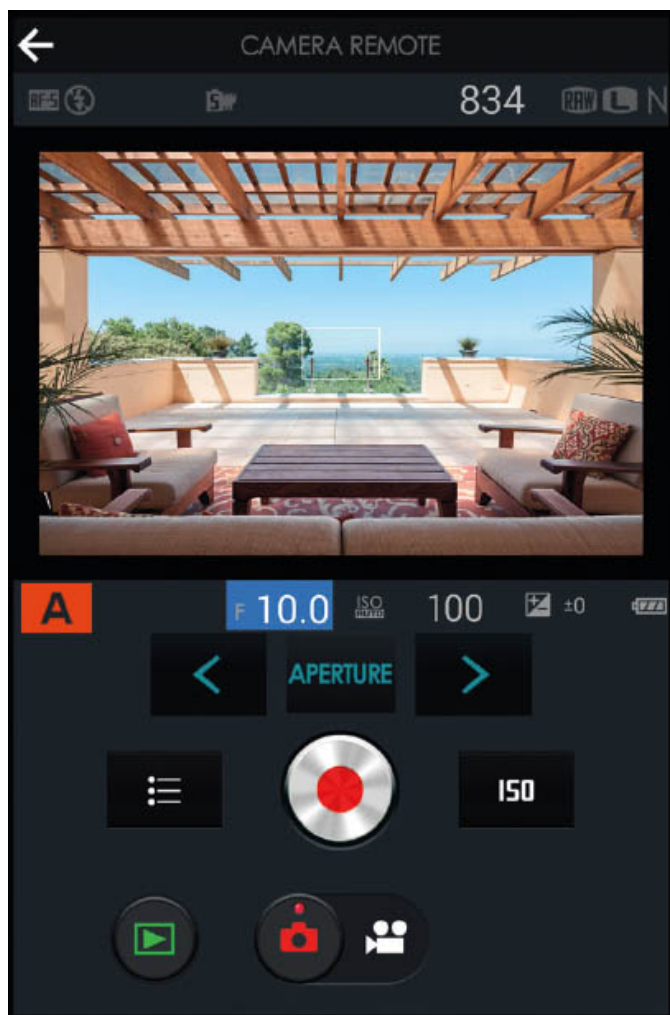


Fig. 49: The user interface for a software application capable of wirelessly controlling a digital camera

2.5.5 Lens Hoods

A lens hood (or sunshade, [fig. 50](#)) is an important accessory that should be packaged with every lens. Unfortunately, this is not always the case, and accessory lens hoods are often quite expensive. They are designed to prevent stray light from entering the lens while not causing additional vignetting effects of their own ([fig. 51](#)). Unless you are using filters, there is no reason not to leave a lens hood attached to your lens at all times. Even at night, a lens hood can prevent light from streetlights or passing cars from spoiling a shot. They also protect the front element of the lens from dings, scratches, and the weather. If you do use a lens hood, make sure it is correctly locked into place, as a misaligned hood can cause unwanted shadows at the edges of the frame. You can also use your hand to block incident sunlight if a lens hood isn't available.



Fig. 50: A “tulip” lens hood



Fig. 51: A lens hood would have helped to block the sunlight and prevent the lens flare that is clearly visible in this image

2.5.6 Filters

Because of the ease with which we can apply effects to digital photos during post-processing, recent years have seen a significant decline in the use of lens-mounted filters. However, some filter effects cannot be simulated digitally, and these are the filters that are still frequently used in architectural situations (section 3.10).



Fig. 52: Circular polarizer

Polarizers: These filters ([fig. 52](#)) only transmit light that oscillates in the

plane the filter is aligned to. They are used to suppress unwanted reflections from smooth, non-metallic surfaces such as windows or water, or to intensify the blue of the sky in areas at a 90-degree angle to the sun. They also increase the contrast between white clouds and blue skies. It is preferable to use circular polarizers with SLR cameras, as only these work correctly with the camera's exposure and autofocus systems. The strength of the polarizing effect is regulated by rotating the foremost ring on the filter.



Fig. 53: A square graduated filter mounted in a holder

Graduated filters: The most practical shape for a graduated filter is either square or rectangular. They are mounted in a special holder that is attached to the front of the lens, which allows you to selectively darken a chosen portion of the frame (fig. 53). This effect is particularly useful for balancing exposure in the two halves of high-contrast scenes, such as a landscape view with a dark foreground and a very bright sky. For our purposes, the

most useful filters are those that do not darken in a linear way from the lower edge, but rather begin to darken in the middle and have a progressively darker tint toward the upper edge.



Fig. 54: A neutral density (ND) filter mounted on a lens

Neutral density filters: Neutral density (ND) filters ([fig. 54](#)) reduce the intensity of the light entering the lens by a predetermined amount, allowing you to use longer shutter speeds than would otherwise be possible. They are available in various densities in a range between one and 10 f-stops or more. A common use for ND filters in an architectural context is to create

motion blur in brightly lit situations. I tend to use 3-stop to 6.66-stop ND filters, which correspond to density values of 0.9 and 2 respectively. There are a wide range of ND filters available, but be warned that quality is not worth skimping on because low-end ND filters tend to result in pronounced color casts. The higher the quality of filter glass and its coating, the lower the risk of reducing overall image quality. The best filters I know of are manufactured by B+W, Hoya, Heliopan, LEE Filters, and Haida.

2.5.7 Lens Adapters

Many **DSLR** owners assume they will only be able to use lenses made by the camera manufacturer or compatible third-party lenses from well-known manufacturers like Sigma, Tamron, or Tokina. However, lens adapters allow you to attach older, manual lenses with M42, Olympus OM, Pentax K, Contax/Yashica, Leica R, or medium format mounts to various DSLR bodies ([fig. 55](#)). When used with contemporary DSLRs, Zeiss or Leica lenses, especially, can often produce better quality images than many modern high-end lenses.



Fig. 55: Mount adapter for the use of other systems' lenses

Adapted lenses have to be focused manually, which can be a problem without the use of a split-image focusing screen. Recently, adapters have appeared with built-in focus-confirm chips. These allow the appropriate focus indicators to light up in the viewfinder when correct focus is achieved. You can also use the magnifier function in combination with your camera's live view mode, which greatly simplifies focusing for stationary subjects. Focus peaking systems, which highlight in-focus contours in the live view, offer yet another potential solution.

Unless using a so-called active adapter with electronic connections capable of relaying aperture information between the camera and the lens, adapted lenses won't transmit aperture data to the camera, so any lens you use needs to have its own aperture ring. You then have to focus with the aperture wide open before stopping down to the working aperture and metering exposure using your camera's built-in light meter. Once you have taken your photo, you have to reopen the aperture to focus your next shot. Of course, this all takes time, but is not a major hindrance in most architectural situations.

Not all lenses can be adapted to work with all types of camera bodies. If the flange focal distance (i.e., the distance between the front of the lens mount and the sensor) is too large, the adapted lens will no longer be able to focus at infinity. This means that DSLRs with an especially large flange focal distance (such as Nikons) or lenses with an especially small flange focal distance (such as older Canon FD lenses) have particular limitations in terms of adaptability. If you really want to use unusual camera/lens combinations, you either have to simply do without an infinity focus setting or use a special adapter with additional built-in optical elements. The latter option can, however, lead to a reduction in overall image quality. Due to their short flange focal distance and the large diameter of the bayonet opening, Canon EOS cameras are the most easily adaptable DSLRs on today's market.

Mirrorless cameras are without peer when it comes to the ability to use alternative lens brands. Thanks to their mirrorless design, these cameras have a particularly small flange focal distance. This characteristic means there is enough physical space for a large number of adapters, which, in turn, makes practically all DSLR lenses and many rangefinder lenses available (even when lenses without aperture rings necessitate the use of an adapter with integrated aperture control capabilities, [fig. 56](#)). You can, for example, use Leica's remarkable lenses from its M series. This breadth of options is not available for DSLRs, because of their significantly

larger flange focal distance. Note that using ultra-wide-angle rangefinder lenses with full-frame image sensors in this way sometimes produces very strong color shifts (section 2.1.5) that have to be corrected afterward.



Fig. 56: : The user interface for a software application capable of wirelessly controlling a digital camera

2.5.8 Grid Focusing Screens

As an aid to composition (section 3.8) and camera alignment, many cameras have built-in electronic grid lines that can be displayed over the image on the monitor. If your DSLR camera doesn't have such a function, it is possible on some models to replace its standard focusing screen with one that has a permanent grid etched onto its surface. The vertical and horizontal lines give you a useful reference for lining up the edges and features of a building and they prompt you to hold the camera level, often reducing the amount of image processing required later ([fig. 58](#)).

2.5.9 Memory Cards

Ever-changing shooting conditions make it difficult to judge in advance how many shots you will need to take to complete a job. There are days when it seems the pictures almost want to jump into camera on their own, while on other days all the pictures seem to be hiding. Always make sure you have a sufficient number of memory cards (or films) with you. If you like to shoot panoramas (section 3.7.1) or HDR or DRI images (section 3.9.5), the multiple shots necessary to create a single image quickly use up memory. RAW format image files often use more memory than you think, and files of 20 MB and more quickly eat up the available space. It can be useful to save additional JPEG copies of your images to make sorting them easier, but these too take up additional space on your memory media. Today's low prices make carrying spare memory cards a must. In general, architectural photographers don't need the fastest memory cards on the market (fig. 57), because midlevel versions tend to be fast enough to process even a bracketing sequence from the camera's buffer. It's best to stick with brand name products, however, because defects in low-end memory cards are to some degree inevitable.



Fig. 57: A very fast SDXC memory card

2.5.10 Batteries

Always keep a spare battery charged and ready to use, especially in situations with no easily available charging facilities—and remember, the capacity of rechargeable batteries is reduced in low temperatures ([fig. 59](#)). Excessive use of the monitor and/or live view quickly drains a camera's batteries, as does the use of an image stabilizer, whether it is lens or camera based. If you find your battery running down with no opportunity to recharge or replace it, switch off your camera's automatic sensor cleaning function and automatic monitor playback function. Switching the camera off between shots also helps to conserve power. An accessory battery grip with an additional portrait format shutter release button is a good alternative power source and, in an emergency, most battery grips can also be powered using conventional batteries purchased from a nearby store. A battery grip also improves camera handling for handheld portrait format shots.



Fig. 58: The viewfinder produced by a grid-type focusing screen



Fig. 59: In low temperatures, the capacity of rechargeable batteries is noticeably reduced



Fig. 60: In this photo, the otherwise unlit foreground has been brightened using off-camera flash

2.5.11Flash

Flash is seldom used in architectural photography. Even the most powerful flash systems are too weak to illuminate the entire exterior of a building. But for interior situations, off-camera accessory flash is used—usually in conjunction with reflectors or other light shapers—to provide accents or to brighten areas that are not illuminated by natural or artificial light ([fig. 60](#))

and to match outside lighting conditions. Built-in pop-up flash or flash units mounted on the camera's flash shoe have no practical use in architectural photography. Most architectural lighting is carefully planned during construction and therefore looks more natural without the use of artificial highlights anyway. Merging multiple images from a bracketing sequence using HDR or DRI techniques (section 3.9.5) is a better way to enhance lighting accents.

2.5.12 Other Accessories

Other useful and inexpensive accessories include rain covers to protect your equipment from wet conditions and blower brushes for cleaning your sensor and lenses. Just in case dust or dirt sticks to the inside of your camera, it is a good idea to carry some sensor cleaning wands with you. A two- or three-way spirit level with a mounting foot that fits into your camera's flash shoe is a great little tool for ensuring precise camera alignment. A high-quality strap with sufficient padding and a pocket tripod ([fig. 61](#)) for spontaneous use on walls or tabletops both save hassle on long photo tours. It's also practical to keep a gray card on hand to achieve proper white balance or to use as a makeshift tool (affixed to a flexible arm with a clamp) to shield your lens from unwanted stray light or sunlight. And, if you find you cannot get quite the right view using the camera monitor, an angle viewer is also a very useful accessory when circumstances demand that you position your camera very close to the ground. Finally, an LCD hood can be particularly helpful when bright conditions make it otherwise difficult to view and adjust your photo.



Fig. 61: A pocket tripod

To conclude: The importance of each accessory becomes most obvious at the moment you need it but don't have it with you.

2.6 Creative Tips and Tricks

The following sections are intended to give you a few ideas for increasing the level of creativity in your architectural photos.

2.6.1 Lensbaby Lenses

Lensbaby accessory lenses are available in a wide range of types that are all

designed to apply selective focus in one way or another (fig. 62). They allow you to produce creative focus effects in a way similar to tilt/shift lenses, with objects at the “sweet spot” in sharp focus while surrounding objects and scenery remain blurry. Lensbaby optics are not intended to produce extremely high-quality images, but rather to encourage artistic use of the optical characteristics embodied in the lens.



Fig. 62: A third-generation Lensbaby

2.6.2 Black-and-White Film

A particularly creative approach to photographing buildings involves using black-and-white film (fig. 63) or simulating it digitally, either in-camera or during post-processing. Monochrome images offer increased potential for the interpretation of a scene and, under certain lighting conditions, contrasting colors can end up producing exactly the same gray tone when converted to black-and-white. This loss of visual information often gives monochrome images a more abstract look, making the shapes and structures of a building a perfect playground for visual experimentation.

Even in the digital age of bubble-gum colors, monochrome images still haven't lost their appeal. Many people perceive black-and-white photos as having a special, more personal touch—an effect that can be enhanced by the grain effects produced by high-sensitivity film. Black-and-white photography becomes especially interesting if grain is deliberately used as a stylistic device (fig. 180); the age of the building in question is then only of secondary importance. Regardless of its subject, a good monochrome photo immediately attracts the viewer's attention.



Fig. 63: 400 ASA black-and-white film

2.6.3 Fixed Focal Length Lenses

The additional brightness offered by fixed focal length lenses is less significant in architectural photography than in other genres, and many photographers think the added brightness doesn't really compensate for

their lack of adjustable focal length. It is nevertheless instructive to use just one or two fixed focal length lenses for a couple of sessions, as this forces you to pay more attention to the intricacies of your immediate surroundings. If you want to give it a try, consider using a single lens with a focal length of 28mm or two lenses, one in the 20–24mm range and another in the 35–45mm range (fig. 64). You will need more time to find exactly the right viewpoint, and you are sure to find yourself considering more alternatives. This exercise sharpens your eye for your subject and helps you to become more familiar with your own approach to shooting. At the end of a day's work, most photographers find that using fixed focal length lenses is not as limiting as they initially expected.



Fig. 64: A photographer using this 21-mm wide-angle fixed focal-length lens in combination with a 35-mm alternative would be prepared for a high percentage of shooting opportunities



3Shooting Techniques

This chapter addresses the “how” of architectural photography, and discusses all the aspects of a photo that should be considered during the shoot. A whole range of factors influence the look of an architectural photo, from things you can regulate (such as your own behavior), to things

you cannot influence at all, like the weather or the ambient light. I will also show how different approaches to a shoot can produce very different results. You can portray a building in an immediate, authentic way; as a more diffuse representation that has little to do with the original purpose of the structure; or even as a completely independent piece of abstract art.



Fig. 65: A documentary architectural photo with a clear, uncluttered composition

3.1 What Makes a Great Architectural Photo?

A successful architectural photo depends on a well-thought-out composition and a clear form of expression. If a building is to be the central element of an image, there should be no other major elements that compete for the viewer's attention. If, however, an image is designed to portray the relationship between two buildings, the relationship has to be unequivocally illustrated to be effective. If you deliberately bend the rules of photography—as is often the case in artistic architectural shots—you have to make sure that this artifice is clear at first glance so that the viewer isn't led to believe that the photographer simply wasn't in control of the situation.



Fig. 66: A modern architectural photograph that includes elements of the building's surroundings in its composition

A great documentary architectural photo captivates the viewer and communicates a clear, uncluttered message that immediately conveys familiarity with the building, even if the viewer doesn't actually know it. It will also be composed entirely to serve the purpose of observation and to emphasize the quality of the building's design (fig. 65).

Modern documentary photography often includes aesthetic elements that are designed to soften the otherwise sterile look of the photo and to give the viewer the opportunity to develop a more authentic, personal feel for the building (fig. 66).



Fig. 67: An artistic architectural photo with a message that is independent of the structure of the building

An artistic architectural photo is judged by the strength of its visual impact and has less to do with the inherent qualities of the building itself. Successful artistic architectural photography grabs the viewer's attention, tells a story, visualizes contradictions, and raises awareness of an architectural environment that would otherwise be only subconsciously perceived (fig. 67).

However, the way an individual image is perceived is still a matter of personal taste. While an architect may aim to impress the public with a clear-cut, shadow-free façade, a photographer may find the interplay of light and shade the most interesting part of the design. A viewer who is inexperienced in both professions may be impressed by an extraordinary effect on an ordinary department storefront, or may find pleasure in just recognizing a familiar building.

Architects and Photographers: Different Ways of Seeing

The needs and desires of photographers and architects unavoidably

collide in the world of architectural photography. Although both professions qualify as arts, architects and photographers tend to see things very differently.

An architect designs and forms three-dimensional spaces, while a photographer is concerned with only two dimensions. An architect views a concept and a design as a constant that lasts over time, whereas a photographer is more concerned with the interplay of light and shade and the subjective effect of a building's design at one particular moment.

Architects like to see photos that contain a maximum of visual information and that convey the dimensional and tactile effects of the structure in a pure, unadulterated fashion. A photographer's interpretation can use framing and composition to produce a very different impression of the same building—an impression that can be seen by the architect to have a negative effect on the informational nature of the image.

The fact is, every architectural photo represents an interpretation that can, from an architect's point of view, endanger the authenticity and informational nature of a building's appearance. This contradiction makes it especially difficult for an architectural photographer to satisfy both parties with a single photo.



Fig. 68: In this example, the building is the dominant, central element of the image

3.2 The Role of Architecture as a Photographic Subject

The central element of every architectural photo is the building. The sheer size of buildings makes them very different from almost every other type of photographic subject. An architectural photographer can not only photograph the subject from outside, but can also step into the subject and capture images of its inner life. Additionally, a building is immovably connected to its environment, which means that the photographer always has to make the effort to visit the subject.

Typically, all elements surrounding a building play a secondary role in the composition of an architectural photograph, resulting in an image with an unequivocal message (fig. 68). The significance of each individual building in images that contain more than one major structure can vary. Sometimes, a single building will dominate due to its size or central position, while at other times, the arrangement of multiple structures can give each a similar weight within the overall composition (fig. 69). This is often the case when several buildings form a homogenous pattern or are made of similar materials. Whatever the physical arrangement, the building(s) remain the central element of the photo's message.



Fig. 69: Multiple buildings as part of a harmonious overall composition



Fig. 70: In this example, the building and the secondary subject create balanced tension

One of the major aspects of more artistic architectural photography is the inclusion of elements of the surroundings as part of the overall composition. This results in a redistribution of the significance of the individual elements in an image while the inclusion of trees, people, street signs, etc. increases visual tension. Here, the building is no longer the sole subject, but shares its significance with other subjects of equal value ([fig. 70](#)).

Images in which the architecture plays only a secondary role can nevertheless be considered as architectural photos—for example, if a building serves as a background for a subject or is visible as a reflection ([fig. 71](#)). It is even possible to capture architectural images in which a building, through clever use of composition and camera angles, is not actually recognizable as such. The result is a graphic image constructed purely from lines and shapes ([fig. 72](#)).

It is therefore necessary to consider just how you want to portray a building before you begin to take pictures.



Fig. 71: Architecture as a secondary subject



Fig. 72: An abstract architectural image



Fig. 73: A central positioning of a modern building



Fig. 74: Including the surroundings of this decrepit building produces an effective architectural tension

3.2.1 What Types of Architecture Make Suitable Subjects?

Generally speaking, any building in any state of repair can make a good photographic subject. A successful architectural photo doesn't necessarily depend on the condition of the building; rather, the way a building is photographed determines whether the resulting image is pleasing. The best approach to shooting varies from building to building. A centralized, sunlit composition with the building as the dominant theme is often the best way to photograph modern office buildings (fig. 73), while the mood in a photo of an old building can be positively influenced by including some of its surroundings in the composition (fig. 74) or by dramatic weather conditions.



Fig. 75: An old, dilapidated building



Fig. 76: The use of a tight angle of view and a long focal length emphasize the repeated patterns and shapes in this urban residential building



Fig. 77: An architectural photo of a bridge

An important exercise is to consider the various ways architecture is present in everyday life. These range from ancient landmarks such as churches, castles, and palaces to strictly functional new buildings such as industrial production plants or warehouses. Spectacular public buildings are no more or less part of the architectural infrastructure than long-forgotten, condemned buildings (fig. 75), ruins out in the country, or ordinary urban apartment complexes (fig. 76). Bridges, temporary construction sites,

pyramids, bunkers, water towers, radio towers, and public restrooms are all part of the architectural whole that surrounds us (fig. 77). If a photographer is sufficiently creative, all of these, and more, can become the subjects of excellent architectural photos.

Stepping off the beaten path and exploring areas on foot is the best way to discover unconventional subjects for your architectural photography—subjects different from the obvious tourist and landmark attractions. It's not at all uncommon that a fascinating subject is just found around the next corner, right where you least expect it (fig. 78).

Doing some research at home using websites such as Google Maps to view satellite images of your destination can go a long way in increasing your chances for discovering enticing subjects. Visiting online photography forums that make use of geolocation services with up-to-date maps, such as Panoramio, is another surefire way to develop a sharper sense of what to look for in a specific area and to discover previously unconsidered subjects for your work.



Fig. 78: An unconventional architectural photograph composed of various structural figures and elements piled on top of one another

3.2.2 Learning to See

Every photographer needs to have an innate feeling for particular situations and configurations of events in order to successfully identify interesting and unusual opportunities while out and about. The static nature of buildings makes it especially important to understand the spatial relations between various elements of a building. Ideally, you will be able to judge in advance which viewpoint will produce the best results, as this is one aspect of a photo that you definitely cannot alter later. If the overall composition of an image isn't right during the shoot, even heavy image processing won't help you to transform it into something better. The ability to "see" photographic subjects varies enormously from person to person. Some photographers instinctively find unusual images and new ways to portray apparently everyday subjects. They already have ideas about how to compose an image before others have even recognized the subject. But less instinctive people are not necessarily destined to be poor photographers, and can find comfort in Ansel Adams' famous saying, "Twelve significant photographs in any one year is a good crop." And remember, it is certainly possible to learn and practice seeing opportunities.

So how should you set about training your photographic eye? One useful approach is to visit an area with a variety of architectural subjects on a number of occasions, and don't be afraid to use up all of your available memory capacity if you are shooting digitally ([fig. 79](#)). If you sift through your images regularly, you will quickly learn to recognize which are worth keeping and which you can delete immediately. Sorting and judging your images helps you to learn what you can do differently next time. Revisiting a particular place also helps you to learn its strengths and weaknesses, and gives you the wherewithal to find new views and perspectives. This way, you are constantly honing your photographic skills and improving the quality of your images.



Fig. 79: Comparing various shots of a single subject

Another way to sharpen your eye is to shoot a couple of overview shots of a subject and analyze them later. In this case, considering which parts of a subject would make an interesting photo if they were to be isolated or enhanced ([fig. 80](#)) gives you a better eye for the potential subjects within a broadly-composed image. You can also use image-processing software to perform experimental crops and to try out various ways of framing a scene. Once you have been through processes like these, it will be much easier to find new views of the subject next time you are there in person ([fig. 81](#)).



Fig. 80: Various approaches to a composition

Yet another way to come to grips with the genre is to analyze coffee-table books of architectural photos. Ask yourself what is special about how the photographer has portrayed a building, or how the image is composed. Consider why the angle of view chosen by the artist works and try to identify why you prefer certain images to others. Most important, ask yourself what you would do differently. Studying high-quality, professionally produced images is a great way to gain new insights that you can add to your own repertoire the next time you are on a shoot.

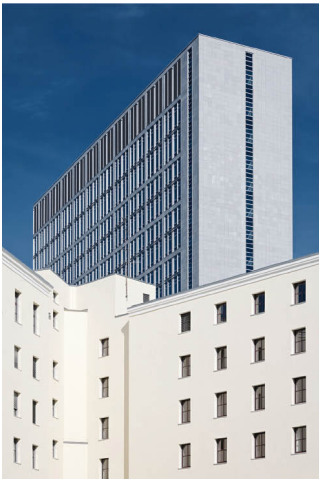
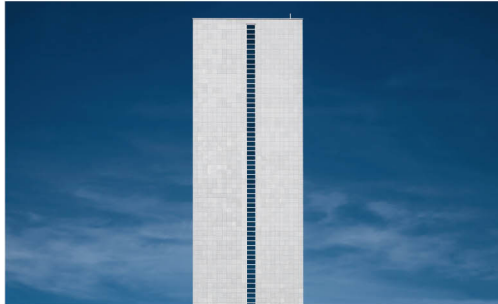


Fig. 81: The results of realizing some of the ideas shown in figure 80

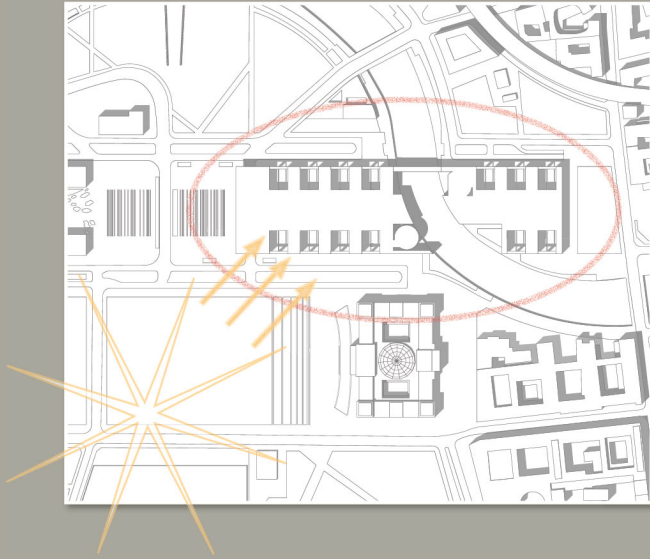
Photographing Buildings: A Brief Guide

Once you have chosen your subject, you need to analyze the situation and its specific characteristics:

- *Which side of the building is best suited to being photographed? Where are shadows or backlight positioned? What is the*

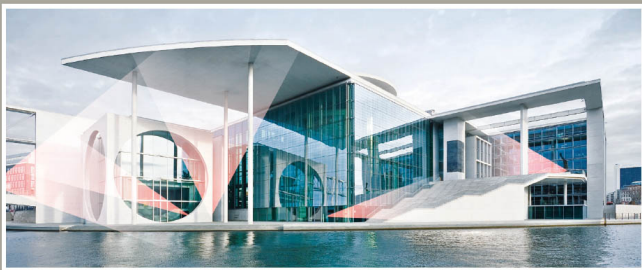
weather like? What other structures characterize the surroundings?

- *What specific physical structures does the building have? Are there any interesting (or irritating) reflections?*
- *How do you want to portray the building—in a documentary or an artistic style? Static or dynamic?*



The next step involves a detailed analysis of your subject's surroundings:

- *Which camera angle best emphasizes the building's strengths?*
- *Which camera positions will deliver great shots and which are less suitable?*
- *Which elements of the building's surroundings should you include in your shot, and which should you leave out?*
- *Do you want to shoot in landscape or portrait format?*



The final step involves selecting your camera settings and the accessories you will use to make the shot:

- Which accessories (tripod, filter, remote release, etc.) do you need?
- Which focal length lens is best for capturing your chosen composition?
- How do you want to compose your image? With the subject in the center? Using the Golden Ratio? Or with the subject positioned toward the edge of the frame?
- How will you avoid converging verticals?
- Which camera settings will produce a balanced exposure?
- What is the right moment to release the shutter? Which people, cars, or shadows are you waiting for?



3.3Perspective

Taking photographs means capturing a three-dimensional space and

converting it to two dimensions. The most important physical principle governing this transformation is the principle of perspective, which represents the effect of a subject's space and depth in a two-dimensional plane. Perspective is fundamentally the projection of space onto a flat surface (fig. 82). Photographic images follow the rules of central projection, also called vanishing point projection, preserving the natural perception to which the human eye is accustomed.

The perspective effect in a photo is determined by the position the photo is taken from and the direction the camera is pointing. In other words, you can only change the perspective within an image by changing your viewpoint. The widely held belief that the focal length of the lens you use influences the perspective in the resulting image is, quite simply, false (fig. 83). The spatial effects produced by wide-angle lenses are due to the fact that they capture a wider angle of view. The actual spatial relations within a scene don't change just because you alter the focal length of the lens you use to capture it.

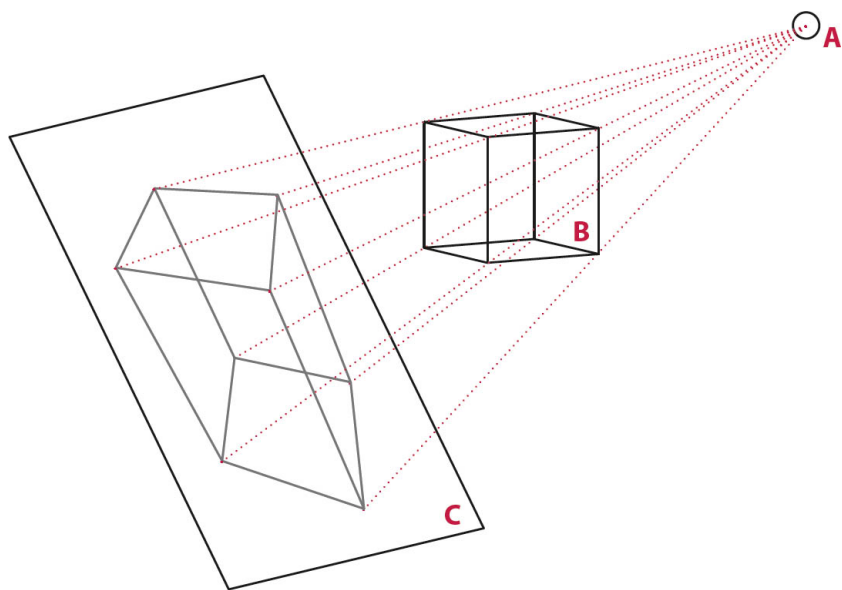


Abb. 82: An illustration of the central projection of a cube with labels for (A) the point of sight, (B) the spatial object, and (C) the projection surface



Fig. 83: Comparing perspective in two photos taken from the same place using two different focal lengths [17mm and 32mm]



Fig. 84: A building photographed using central perspective



Fig. 85: A building photographed using two-point perspective

3.3.1 The Importance of Vanishing Points

Vanishing points play an important role in the portrayal of architectural (i.e., geometrical) forms. If parallel lines in three-dimensional space extend into the distance, a photographic image will represent them as intersecting on a defined vanishing point (Vp). If you point your camera directly at the horizon, all the vertical lines within the frame will appear vertical in your image. This is an effect that we often utilize when photographing buildings.

The number of vanishing points in an image has a significant effect on its appearance. In the case of **central perspective** (not to be confused with central projection), all parallel lines going into the distance end up at a vanishing point located in the middle of the picture and at the horizon. You need to stand squarely in front of your subject and position your camera horizontally (and pointing at the horizon) to take pictures like this. This means that the front wall of the building you are photographing remains parallel to the image sensor plane, which keeps all the parallel lines within the building's façade parallel in your image (fig. 84). Although this type of shot looks pleasing, it is also rather unspectacular. For some subjects it is also too two-dimensional and flat looking because the building's heft can hardly be seen.



Fig. 86: Worm's-eye view



Fig. 87: Bird's-eye view

Two-point perspective, which furnishes an image with two separate vanishing points on the horizon, is equivalent to photographing a building from a corner rather than head-on (fig. 85). Here too, the camera has to be positioned horizontally, but in this case, only vertical lines appear parallel in the resulting image. Two-point perspective images have a vivid, dynamic appearance that clearly illustrates the volume of a building but which can also distract the viewer from the finer points of the architecture itself.

Images shot from a **worm's-eye view** (i.e., from below; fig. 86) or from a **bird's-eye view** (i.e., from above; fig. 87) usually have three vanishing points. Here, the camera is no longer pointed at the horizon but instead at an imaginary point above or below it. These types of perspectives come into play when conventional camera positions no longer allow you to capture the entire subject without tilting your camera. In this type of image, vertical lines also converge at a point above or below the horizon.



Fig. 88: The source photo with slightly converging verticals



Fig. 89: The same shot corrected using a tilt/shift lens

3.4Converging Verticals

Converging verticals don't bother us when we are walking along a street, due to the close cooperation between our sense of balance and our visual

perception. However, things look different when we view converging verticals in two-dimensional images, as our brain immediately signals that something is wrong. If converging verticals approach each other at a mild angle, a picture can create a restless impression, and a depicted building's aesthetics may be compromised (figs. 88 and 89). This can confuse the viewer and produce a jarring impression of a building that is sometimes severe enough to make it look as if it is tipping over backwards. An unwritten rule dictates that architectural photographers generally try to keep vertical lines vertical in their images. This helps to avoid unwanted tension and keeps the composition (and the appearance of the architecture) clear and uncluttered.



Fig. 90: This high rise has a rigid feel to it due to the perfectly corrected converging verticals



Fig. 91: Many viewers find subtly converging verticals easier on the eye and closer to reality

But are converging lines always a bad thing? In some cases, subtly converging vertical lines in architectural photographs produce a

harmonious effect (figs. 90 and 91). Furthermore, photographic depictions with modestly converging lines in some ways better replicate our natural perception of buildings, because tall structures appear to taper to the naked eye as well. And to extend this line of thinking even further, strongly converging verticals can be used deliberately to add drama or artistic impact to an image—an effect that is often used in photos of skyscrapers (ideally with textured façades) or in situations where the photographer is located very close to the building and is shooting almost directly upward (fig. 92). The effect of converging lines, in other words, becomes a central element of the photograph's composition.



Fig. 92: Converging verticals used deliberately as a dominant stylistic device [focal length: 28mm]

3.4.1 How to Avoid Converging Verticals in Your Photos

To represent a building without converging verticals is not always easy. The closer one is to the building, the more difficult it is to avoid converging verticals. This is because the camera has to be tilted upward in order to fill the frame. The following sections detail a selection of techniques for working around the problem.



Fig. 93: Avoiding converging verticals by shooting from a great distance [focal length: 70mm]

Increase the subject distance: If the situation allows, simply move back and use a longer lens to reframe the subject (fig. 93). This simple measure can help to partially or even completely eliminate converging verticals if you are careful to point the optical axis of your lens directly at the horizon. You can fine-tune any remaining anomalies later on a computer. Unfortunately, there is often not enough space surrounding a building to get far enough away. Also, the greater the distance between camera and subject, the greater the risk of other objects getting in the way and spoiling your composition. Furthermore, increasing the subject distance also compresses perspective (section 3.5.5).

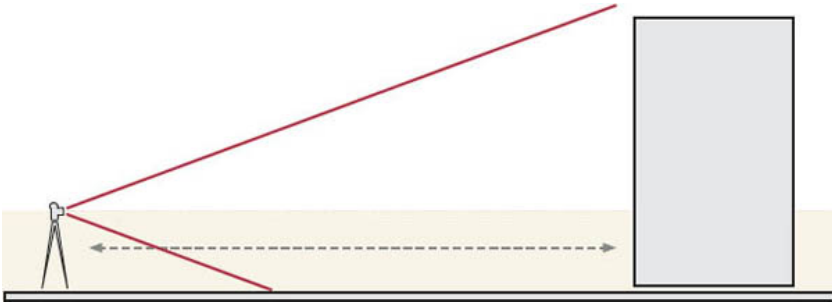
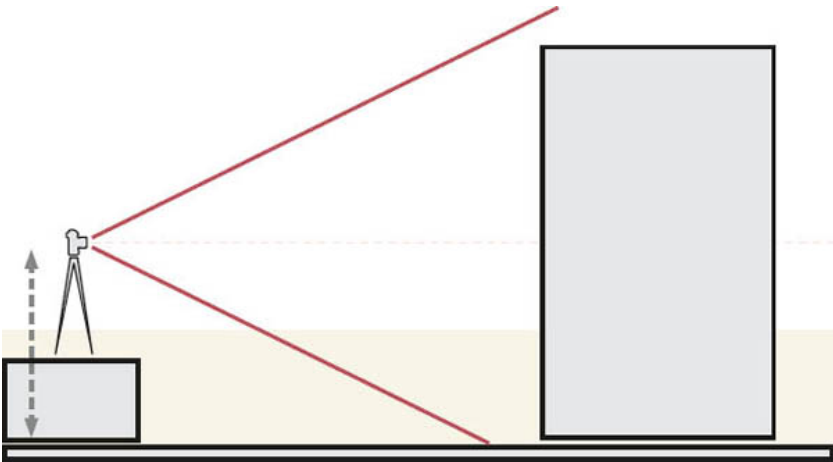


Fig. 94: Avoiding converging verticals by shooting from a raised standpoint [focal length: 24mm]

Use a raised camera position: A camera position halfway up the subject stops vertical lines from converging (fig. 94) and “automatically” frames the subject around the horizon. You will, of course, need access to a bridge, a pedestal, or the upper floors of a building in the vicinity to make use of this technique. A tall tripod or a super high camera stand is also sometimes enough to use this strategy.



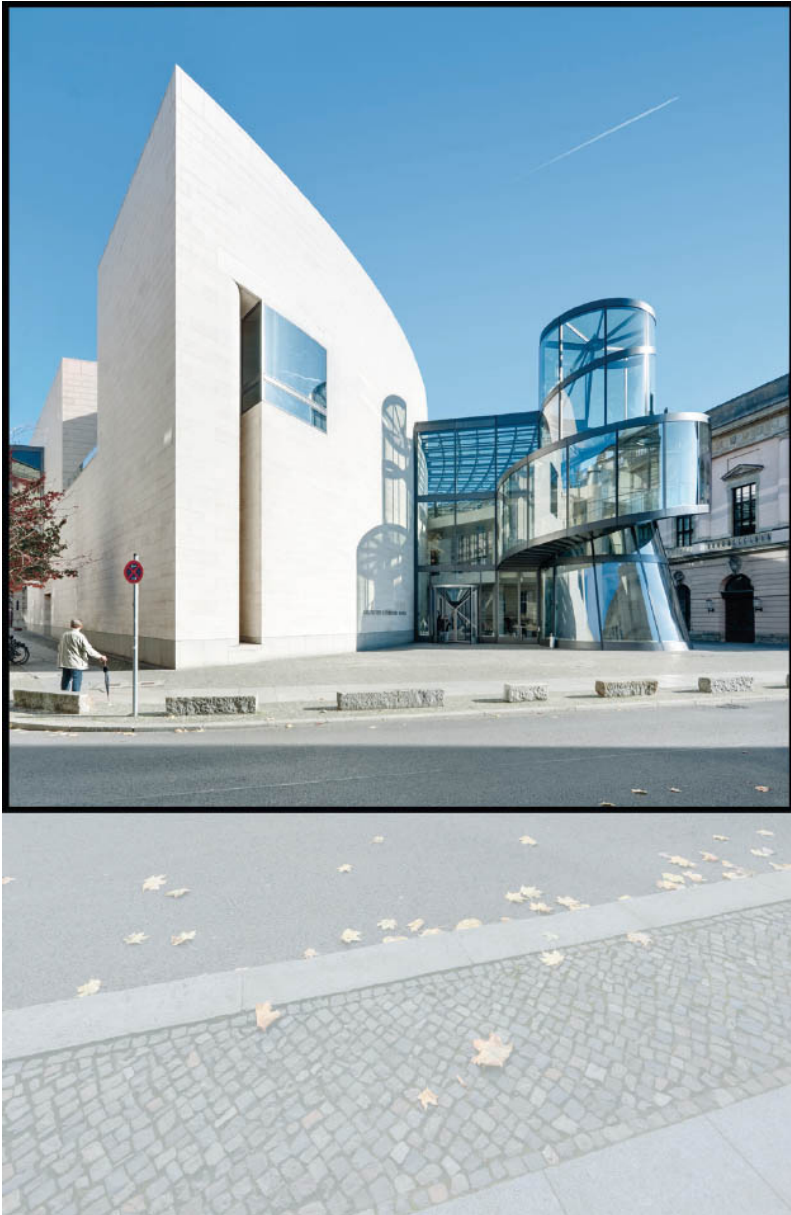


Fig. 95: Avoiding converging verticals by shooting in portrait format using a wide-angle lens and cropping the results [focal length: 17mm]

Use a short lens and shoot in portrait orientation: If you have to shoot from quite close, it can help to use a wider-angle lens than would otherwise

be required to make your shot. Simply set up your camera in portrait orientation, parallel to the ground. The resulting photo will not contain any converging verticals, but the subject will appear at the top of the frame and large portions of the ground in front of the building will be visible in the lower part of the image. This imbalance is easily corrected by cropping the image later (fig. 95), but will produce a smaller finished image with a non-standard format.

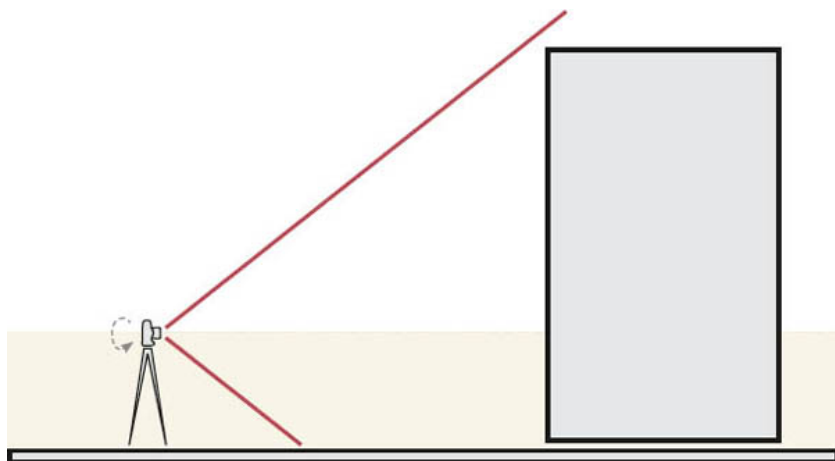


Fig. 96: Software-based perspective and converging vertical correction [focal

length: 32mm]

Employ digital perspective correction: You can also use post-processing software on a computer to correct converging verticals. This involves distorting your image to form a trapezoid and then stretching the entire image upward to counteract the resulting compression effect (fig. 96). This technique can cause irregularity in the sharpness across the image and requires the computer to create artificial image data in the upper portion of your image. As a consequence, it quickly reaches its technical limits if the lines you want to correct converge too strongly. If in doubt, it is always preferable to use this method in combination with one or both of the other methods described above to keep converging verticals to a minimum while shooting.

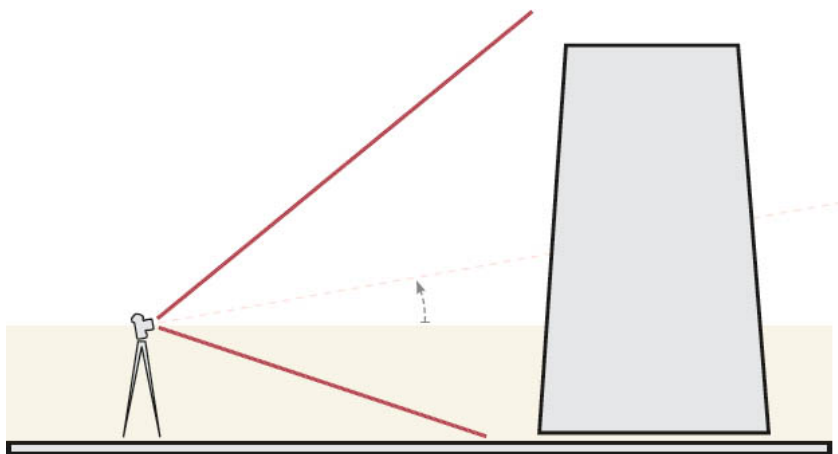
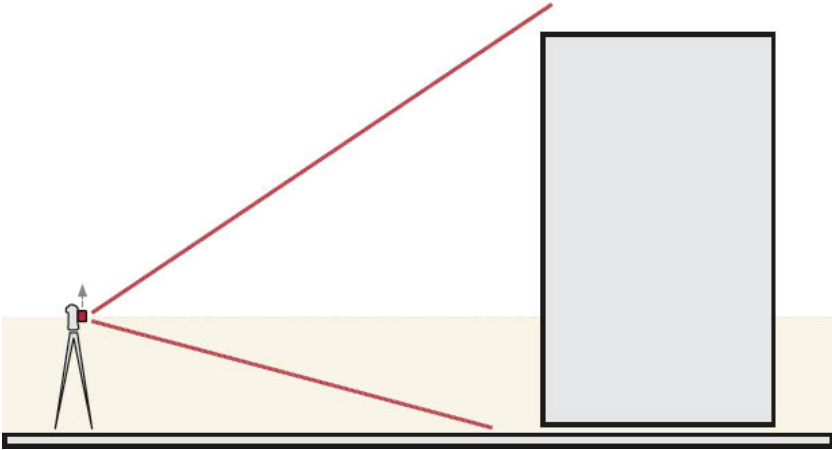




Fig. 97: Perspective correction performed using a tilt/shift lens [focal length: 35mm]

Use a tilt/shift lens: This is the best, but also the most expensive way to produce original images without converging verticals. Use of a tilt/shift lens will allow you to capture vertical lines correctly, even from a relatively low camera position ([fig. 97](#)), and it will keep the required post-processing (and consequent image quality loss) to a minimum. The technique also allows you to shoot directly using your desired framing, rather than having to crop your image later.



3.4.2 How Do Tilt/Shift Lenses Work?

Tilt/shift lenses allow you to shift the optical axis of the lens in relation to the film/sensor plane (fig. 98). Theoretically, this would cause extreme vignetting in a standard lens, but the enlarged image circle in a tilt/shift lens makes it possible to shift the optical axis by up to 12mm without adverse effect. The special construction of these lenses means that they have no autofocus functionality and, if you are using them with an adapter, no automatic aperture control. These are, however, only minor disadvantages.



Fig. 98: Using a tilt/shift lens to alter the vertical position of the optical axis helps to physically correct perspective errors

A medium format lens's larger image circle (e.g., Pentax 645 and 67, Mamiya 645, Contax 645, as well as Hasselblad lenses) makes it possible to use it as tilt/shift lens with conventional 35mm SLRs by way of a special **shift adapter** (fig. 99). Thanks to the longer flange focal distances of medium format lenses (compared to normal 35mm SLR lenses), there is sufficient space to insert the very useful shift mechanism. However, vignetting caused by the camera's mirror box limits the shifts you can perform as well, and therefore the amount of convergence you can correct using an adapted lens. Yet another variation of using a shift adapter involves pairing a standard full-frame lens (with a preferably very large image circle) with a mirrorless camera (fig. 100). Because the mirrorless camera has a very short flange focal distance, there's enough room for the shift adapter. Especially when using a smaller image sensor, such as the APS-C or the Four-Thirds format, the entire image circle from the full-frame lens allows for generous lens shifts. And there are even full-frame lenses around, which allows for (minor) shift movements with full-frame mirrorless cameras.



Fig. 99: Using a medium format lens and a shift adapter to shift the optical axis and correct perspective

So how is a tilt/shift lens actually used? First, use a spirit level or a tripod with a built-in level to position your camera horizontally. It is useful to line up recognizable features of the building at eye level with the AF area markers in the center of the viewfinder, and then set focus with your lens in a neutral shift position, ideally using live view and your camera's monitor magnifier function. You should also meter exposure now, as your camera's focus system will no longer deliver accurate results once you have shifted the optical axis of the lens. Alternatively, you can meter exposure more precisely in live view mode with the lens shifted and the camera's mirror raised. You can now shift the optical axis upward ([fig. 101](#)), which moves the horizon down and makes parts of the subject that were previously outside the upper edge of the frame visible in the viewfinder. The camera and lens remain in a horizontal position. This technique produces an image with no converging verticals and can be performed in exactly the same way in the opposite direction (i.e., moving the optical axis downward in order to photograph lower portions of a building; [fig. 102](#)). Shift lenses also allow you to shift the optical axis sideways, which can be

useful if you want to photograph a building using central perspective from a non-central viewpoint (figs. 103 and 104) or if you want to avoid capturing your own reflection in the building's façade.



Fig. 100: A tilt-shift adapter in use with a full-frame lens and a mirrorless camera

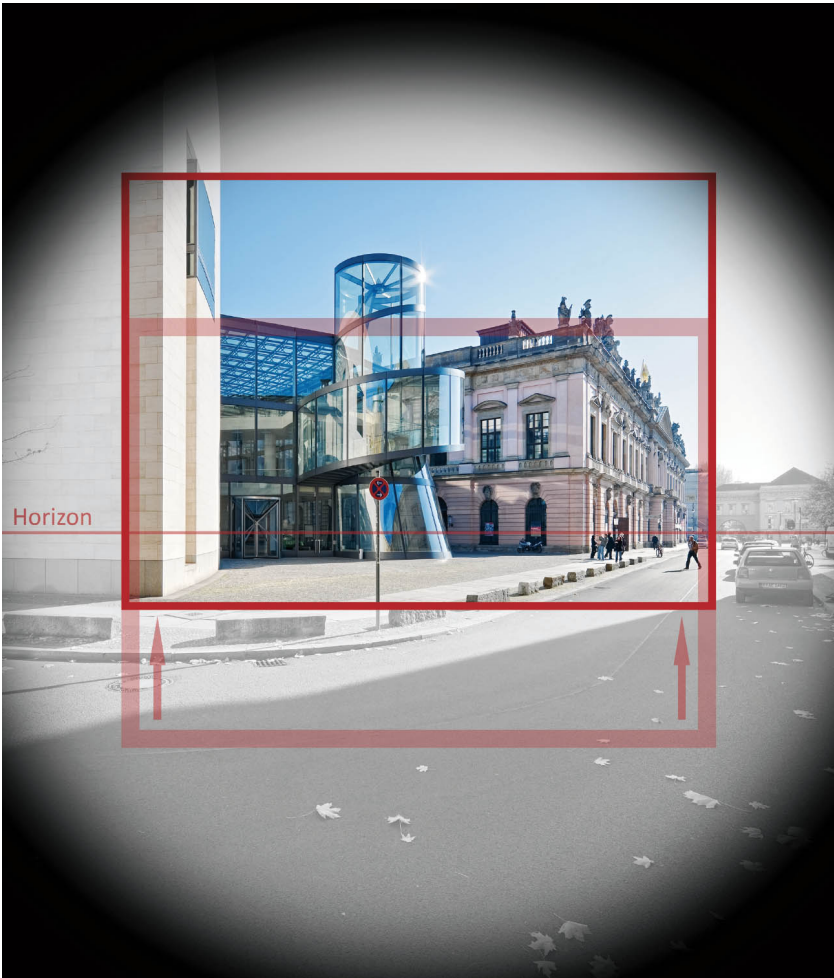


Fig. 101: Using a tilt/shift lens to shift the optical axis within the image circle



Fig. 102: This photo was shot with the optical axis shifted downward [focal length: 55mm]

Shifting the optical axis also allows you to alter your composition—for example, to remove an irritating foreground and include more sky in the frame (figs. 105 and 106). In addition, tilt/shift lenses can be used to aid shooting panoramic images (section 3.6.3).

Using shift lenses always produces a certain amount of vignetting and corner blur at the extreme ends of the shift range, so avoid using the maximum shift settings, if you can. If your lens doesn't provide sufficient shift, you can also tilt the camera slightly to increase the shift effect, which keeps digital corrections—with their inherent loss of image quality—to a

minimum.

The tilt function in a tilt/shift lens allows you to alter the plane of focus of the lens according to the Scheimpflug principle. The uses for this capability in architectural photography are limited but can, for example, be used to keep an entire façade in focus if you are shooting downward from a close distance. Tilt functionality can also be used to create a miniature model effect in photos of real-life scenes (section 3.13.7). If you are using just the shift function, make sure that the tilt function is locked in its zero position. Otherwise, you may end up unwittingly shooting images with extensive unfocused areas.



Fig. 103: An object in the center of the foreground (the car) spoils the overall composition [focal length: 24mm]



Fig. 104: Moving the camera slightly to the right changes the perspective (check out the red circles) and makes the desired shot possible [focal length: 24mm]



Fig. 105, 106: Different effects produced using differing shift settings [focal length: 24mm]

3.5 Camera Standpoint

Since camera position and direction alone are the factors that influence perspective in a photo, making a careful choice of standpoint is essential to the success of a shot. Even slight changes in standpoint can have a strong influence on the look of a photographed building.

3.5.1 The Ideal Subject Distance

The ideal distance between camera and subject depends largely on the type and size of the building, the nature of its immediate environment, and the photographer's visual concept for the image.



Fig. 107: Here, the camera is too close to the subject, producing an unfavorable representation of the balconies [focal length: 24mm]

If the three-dimensional depth of the building is important to the final image, select a standpoint that is close by. The farther you are from a

building, the flatter it will appear in a photo (section 3.5.5). If the building's environment is cluttered, you will have to move closer to get a clear view, but in order to produce an undistorted, realistic-looking image, the laws of optics dictate that you need to move farther away. The larger a building, the farther away you will have to be to capture it with natural-looking proportions.

Extreme standpoints (i.e., those that are unusually close or very distant from the subject) provide specific challenges of their own. Shooting from close up produces pronounced perspective effects, and the low viewpoint emphasizes the effects of protruding or sunken elements of a façade, especially in the upper floors (fig. 107). If you shoot from too near, the resulting converging verticals cannot be corrected later. If the situation forces you to shoot from close up, you will simply have to incorporate the altered perspective in your composition. Extreme perspective in photos of skyscrapers can produce additional tension that contributes to the dynamism of the image, even if the building looks less realistic as a result (fig. 108). The farther you are from your subject, the smaller the role converging verticals will play, and the easier it will be to correct them if they do appear. The disadvantages of greater subject distances are the risk of extraneous objects spoiling your composition and the two-dimensional look that buildings take on when photographed from farther away (fig. 109).

A useful rule of thumb for exterior architectural photography states that the best subject distance lies somewhere between one and three times the height of the building. This is one of the reasons architectural photographers often resort to the use of wide-angle lenses in the course of their work.



Fig. 108: Dramatic perspective produced by shooting from very close up [focal length: 14mm]

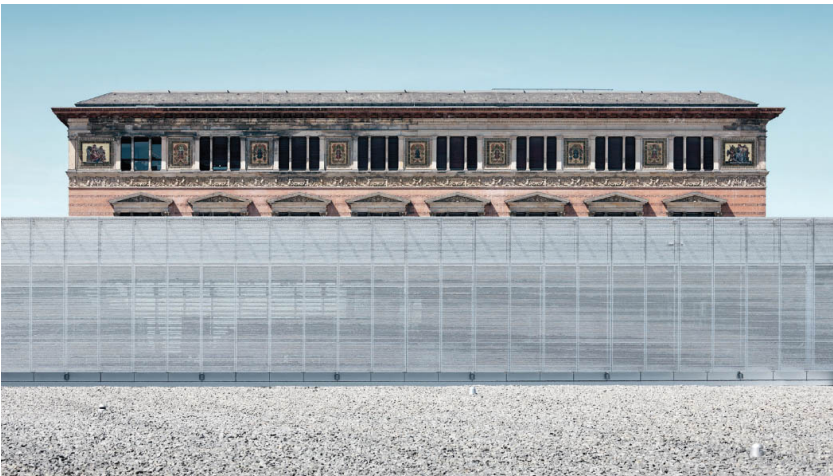


Fig. 109: In this example, a greater subject distance compresses the perspective and produces virtually no converging verticals [focal length: 85 mm]

3.5.2 The Effects of Viewpoint on Perspective

Different viewpoints can provide you with very different compositions, even if you are photographing a single building. Usually, you can compensate for the changes in framing that changes in distance produce by using a different focal length lens. Experienced photographers can use subtle changes in composition to emphasize particular aspects of a building and its design (figs. 110 and 111), or to conceal its less attractive characteristics. A carefully considered standpoint also helps to clarify the relationships between different elements of a design or to give emphasis to various parts of the structure (figs. 112, 113, 114).



Fig. 110: Photographed from afar, the building appears rounded and attractive [focal length: 200mm]

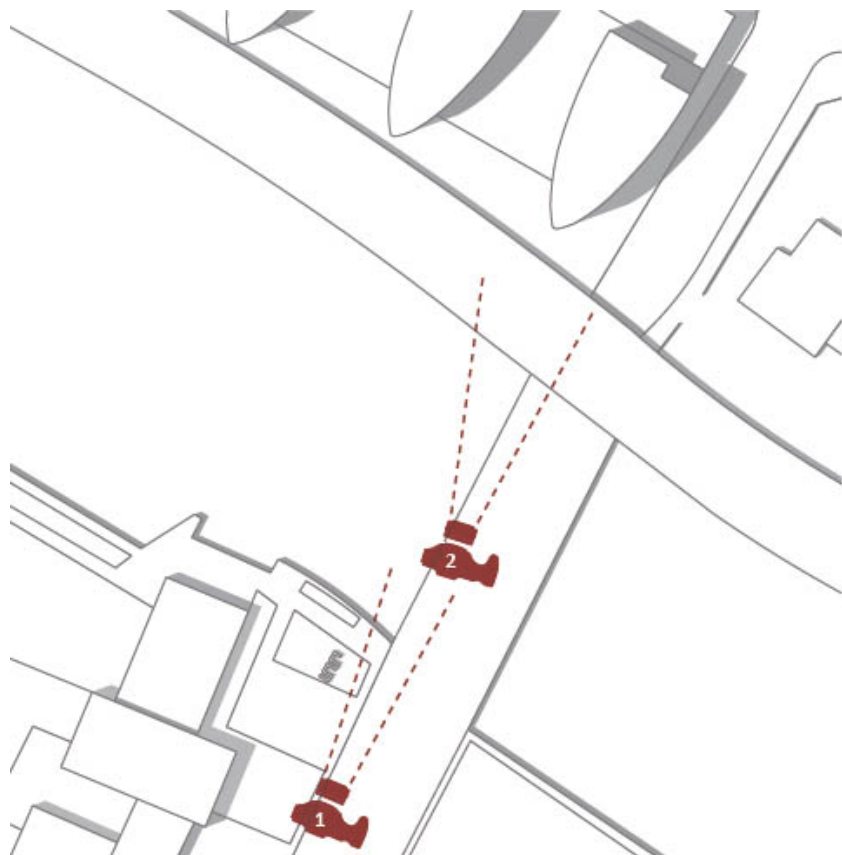
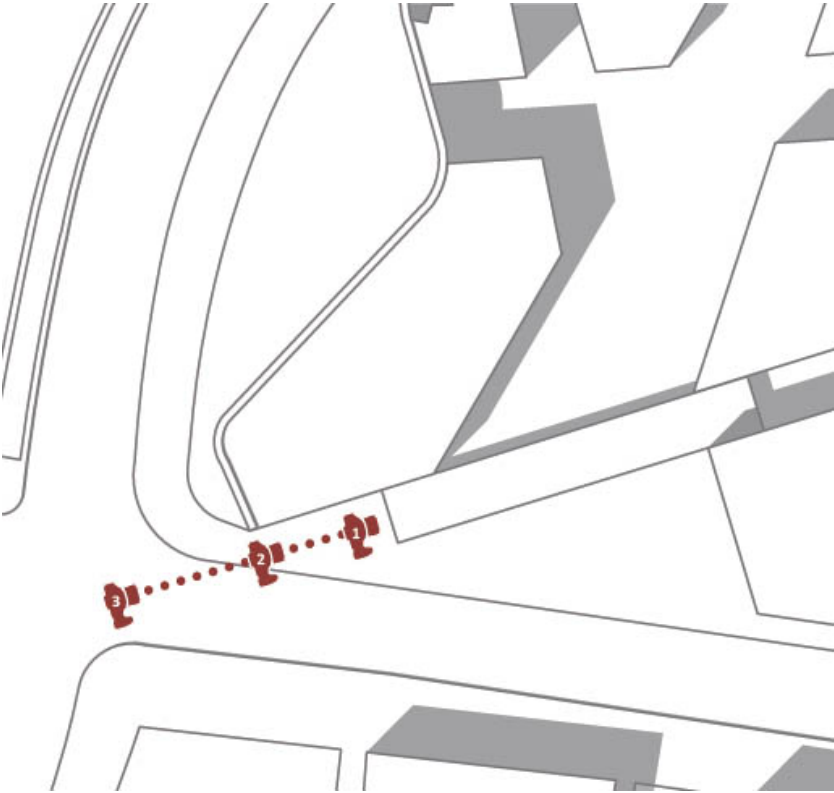




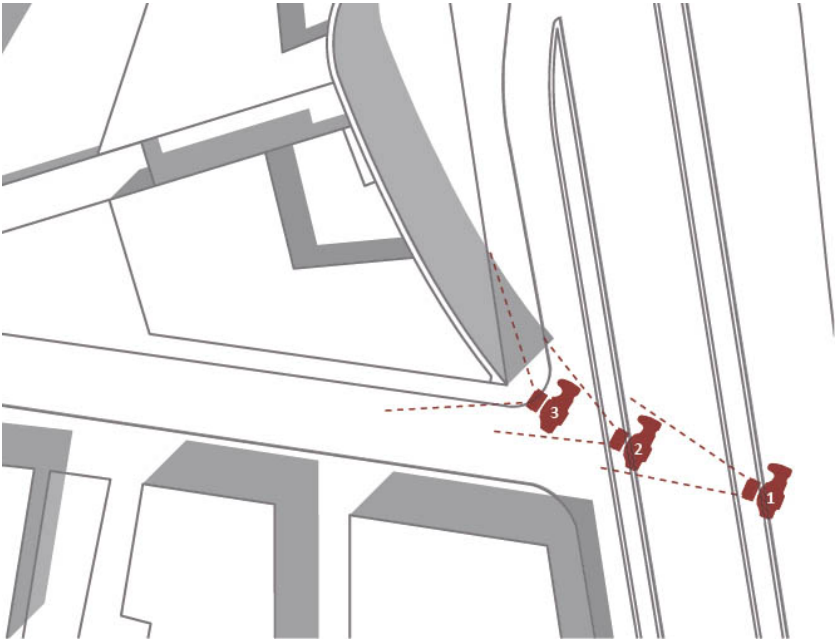
Fig. 111: Photographed from close up, the building appears narrower and more pointed [focal length: 100mm]



Fig. 112, 113, 114: The different proportions and moods that a change of standpoint can produce [focal lengths: 17mm, 35mm, 50mm]



A single building can appear calm and clear from one angle or dramatically proportioned from another (fig. 115). A façade can be made to appear transparent and welcoming from one point of view or shuttered and secretive from another (figs. 116 and 117). Sometimes, moving the camera just a few meters can produce a completely different effect.



Using techniques like these, a photographer can exercise considerable influence on the effect of a photo without that influence being obvious to the viewer. Before you start a shoot, it is important to have a clear idea of just how important your choice of standpoint is and how this choice can affect your original concept and the results. If you shoot from the wrong place, no amount of image processing will improve the results.

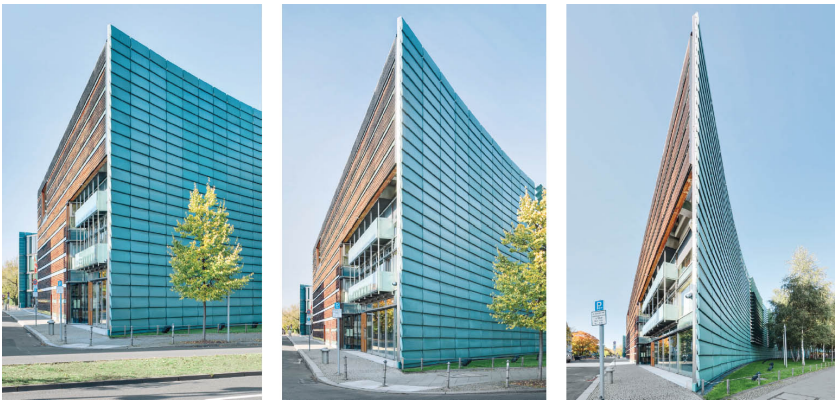


Fig. 115: On the left, a medium subject distance produces a natural-looking image with a realistic feeling of depth. In the center and on the right, increasing proximity

to the subject produces increasingly dramatic spatial effects [focal lengths: 50mm, 24mm, 12mm].

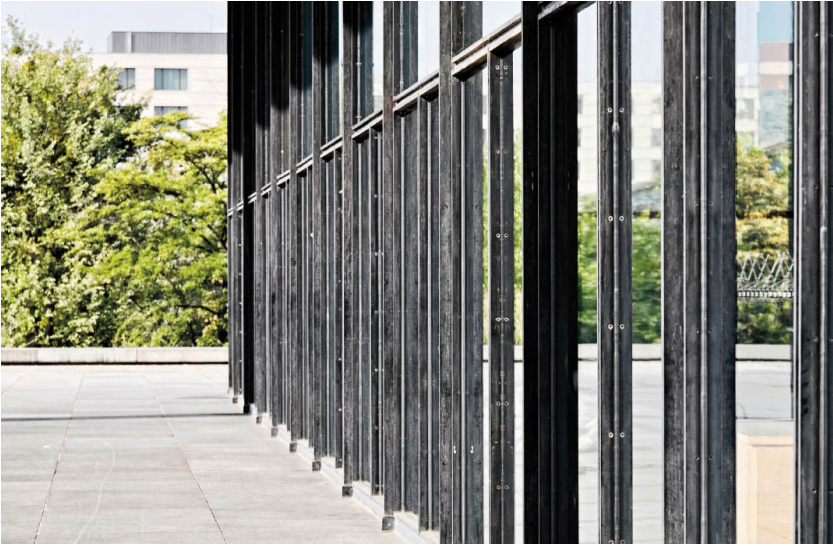


Fig. 116: Here, the camera angle compresses the space between the individual elements of the building's framework and gives the glass façade a forbidding, closed look



Fig. 117: A slight change of standpoint completely alters the effect of the façade, making it welcoming and transparent

3.5.3 Standpoint and Surroundings

A change in standpoint also means that other elements of the immediate environment will be captured and portrayed differently, which can have positive or negative effects on the overall look of an image. It is easier to concentrate on photographing a freestanding building than one that is located close to other buildings in a busy environment. A theoretically interesting viewpoint is not of much use if the view of the building itself is obscured by trees or bushes. In cases like this, a small change of camera position can make all the difference (figs. 118 and 119). A change of standpoint can also provide a different view of a building's surroundings, producing an image with a completely different mood (figs. 120 and 121). Last but not least, moving the camera can alter the weight of a building and its surroundings, thus conveying a very different message (figs. 122 and 123). The art of successful architectural photography lies not only in finding the right view of a building, but also in the skillful integration of its surroundings in the overall composition.



Fig. 118: The cluttered foreground spoils this composition . . .



Fig. 119: . . . but a slight change of camera position produces a successful image



Fig. 120: In this image, the street dominates the composition and visually separates the viewer from the building. The forecourt plays only a secondary role [focal length: 24mm].



Fig. 121: Once again, changing the camera position completely alters the impact of the scene. The forecourt appears larger and wider, and gives the viewer a feeling of inclusion in the building [focal length: 24mm].



Fig. 122: In this image, the building and the courtyard dominate the composition, with the sculpture playing an ancillary role [focal length: 24mm]



Fig. 123: Changing the camera position gives the sculpture the dominant role in this photograph of the same subject [focal length: 24mm]

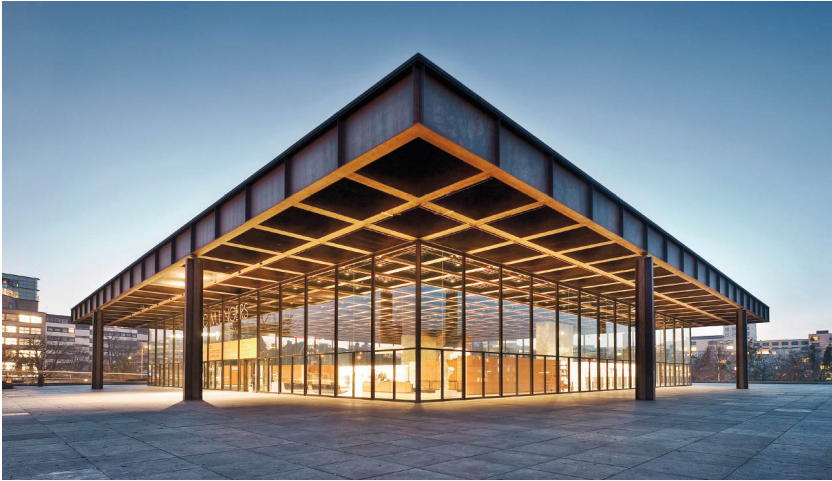


Fig. 124: The camera's position on the diagonal axis of the building gives the resulting image a monumental look

3.5.4 Standpoint and Symmetry

Symmetry, too, can be used to great effect in architectural photos, but it is important to differentiate between architectural and photographic symmetry. A symmetrical building doesn't have to appear symmetrical in a photo, although a coincidence of structural and visual symmetry can create impressive effects. Most viewers find symmetrical architectural images pleasing, due to their monumental and often slightly artificial look ([fig. 124](#)).



Fig. 125: An unimpressive, flat symmetry effect caused by the head-on viewpoint

In order to use symmetry successfully as an element of a photographic composition, the photographer has to align the camera precisely along the axis of symmetry of the building. Even the smallest movement away from this axis can create unnecessary tension and spoil the effect. Ideally, objects external to the building itself will either adhere to the basic symmetry in the image (fig. 126) or not be of sufficient significance to spoil the overall effect. Photos shot along the diagonal axis of square buildings create especially interesting visual dynamics, as they produce a great feeling of depth in addition to the symmetry the image is based on. Photos of courtyards and round or elliptical buildings are perfect subjects for close-

range, symmetrical architectural photos, too.

The strength of a symmetrical effect depends on the degree to which the physical depth of the building is made visible. If you photograph the side of a building head-on, the effect will be less dynamic, and the special effect that symmetrical vanishing points have will be lost ([fig. 125](#)).



Fig. 126: A strictly symmetrical composition



Fig. 127: A compressed perspective established by a large subject distance [80mm focal length, distance of 160 meters]

3.5.5 Spatial Depth

The feeling of depth in an architectural photo is related directly to your chosen standpoint. If there are several objects located far away from the camera, the space between them seems compressed ([fig. 127](#)). On the flip side, if the distance between the subject and the camera is very short, the foreground appears more prominent than the background. Close objects will appear very large, and objects farther away will appear much smaller, giving the image a feeling of openness and space.

Practically speaking, you will need to use a telephoto lens to properly frame distant subjects and wide-angle lenses to capture subjects that are close by. Perhaps this gives rise to the myth that the perspective depth perception is a function of focal length. In fact, it can be just as simple to use a wide-angle lens to capture distant subjects and crop the results to achieve your desired framing. The flip side of the same idea is to use a telephoto lens at a short distance and shoot a sequence of images that you can later merge into a panorama—the perspective and perception of depth (not to be confused with depth of field) in both images would remain the same.

Extreme distances give subjects a two-dimensional look reminiscent of collage-type effects, with the rear elements of a building appearing only slightly smaller than the front elements. The apparent compression of space gives a building a flat, almost cardboard look. This type of effect can be used to produce abstract-looking images that heavily disguise the real nature of a subject's depth (fig. 128).



Fig. 128: Here, the large subject distance strongly compresses perspective [180mm focal length, distance of 350 meters]

Documentary photographers usually try to keep the depth effects in their images as realistic-looking as possible, and they tend to use moderate

wide-angle lenses to achieve this. Full-frame focal lengths of around 40mm produce images with a feeling of depth that is very similar to that of human visual perception, and the viewer of such an image can accurately judge the spatial relations of objects within the frame on the basis of real-world experience (fig. 129). If you shoot closer to the same subject using a shorter focal length lens, you can give otherwise cramped-looking architecture a slightly artificial, wide-open look (fig. 130). Objects close to the camera appear disproportionately large, while distant objects appear smaller than they really are. Overall, photos shot at close distances using short focal lengths produce a greater feeling of depth that communicates either spatial depth (fig. 130) or extreme perspective distortion (fig. 131). Photos shot from afar give the viewer very little spatial information, whereas wide-angle shots provide a feeling of depth that is often exaggerated, but nevertheless interpretable.



Fig. 129: The camera position and the moderate focal length produce a realistic-looking spatial effect [focal length: 40mm]



Fig. 130: In this case, an ultra-wide-angle lens and a shooting position very close to the subject give the building and its surroundings an unnaturally wide open look [focal length: 17mm]



Fig. 131: Here, the short subject distance produces strong perspective distortion [focal length: 17mm]

3.6The Effects of Focal Length

The choice of focal length is closely related to the camera standpoint, although there are various possible approaches to finding the right combination of the two factors. Some photographers stick to a predetermined camera position and select an appropriate focal length, while others prefer to use a particular lens and move about until they find the viewpoint and composition that best matches it.

Using a zoom lens is a more flexible approach, as it allows you to adjust focal length smoothly without having to move the camera. If you use a fixed focal length lens, you will have to move around a bit more to find the right position.

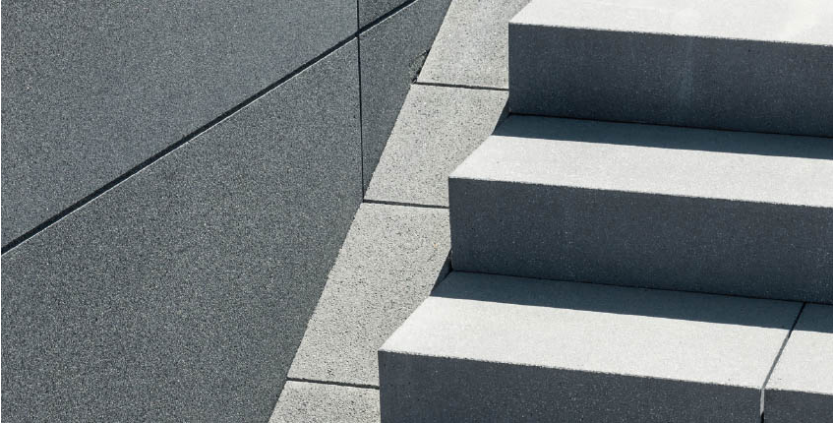
Extreme focal lengths (less than 16mm or greater than 200mm equivalent) produce extreme effects that are seldom useful in an architectural context and are not frequently used by professionals. They should really be used only on rare occasions when such optics allow you to capture images that would otherwise be difficult or impossible to realize. Ideally, every architectural photographer should have access to a broad range of lenses that allow an unrestricted choice of camera position.

3.6.1 Long Focal Length Lenses

As already mentioned, the fact that long telephoto lenses compel the photographer to shoot from a large distance restricts their use to special situations.

Long focal length lenses are great for emphasizing details and the materials used in a building's structure ([fig. 132](#); section 3.8.3), but give you significantly less depth of field to work with than wide-angle lenses. It is therefore important to use relatively small apertures when using long lenses; otherwise you run the risk of blurring important details.

The narrow angle of view of a telephoto gives you the opportunity to emphasize details by isolating them from the background ([fig. 133](#)).



*Fig. 132: A modest telephoto lens can be used to accentuate construction details
[focal length: 80mm]*



Fig. 133: Using a telephoto lens emphasizes details in a building's surface against a monotone background [focal length: 100mm]

Due to the compressed perspective produced by the large distance from the subject, telephoto lenses also allow you to portray multiple subjects that inhabit large spaces in a single image ([fig. 134](#)), giving them a mutual

context that is otherwise not obvious to the viewer (fig. 135). The same effect can also be used to isolate shapes and produce artistic images of a much more abstract nature (fig. 136).



Fig. 134: A long lens and a large subject distance produce strongly compressed

perspective [focal length: 150mm]



Fig. 135: In this image, a long lens was used to establish a relationship between two buildings that are actually located a great distance apart [focal length: 100mm]

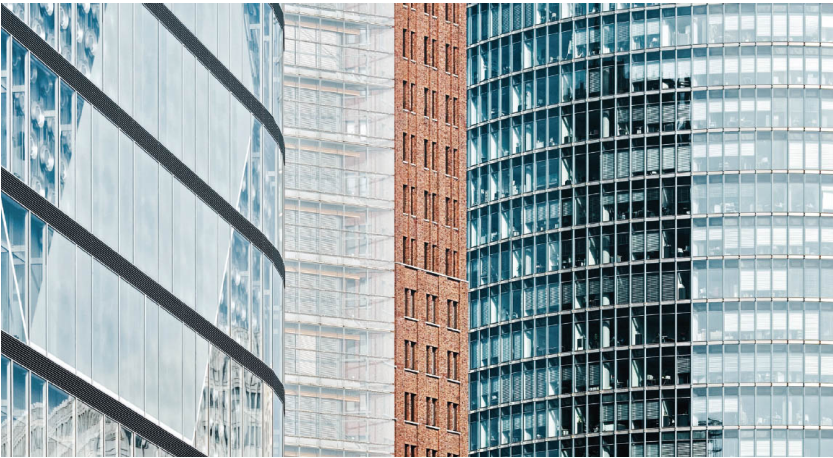


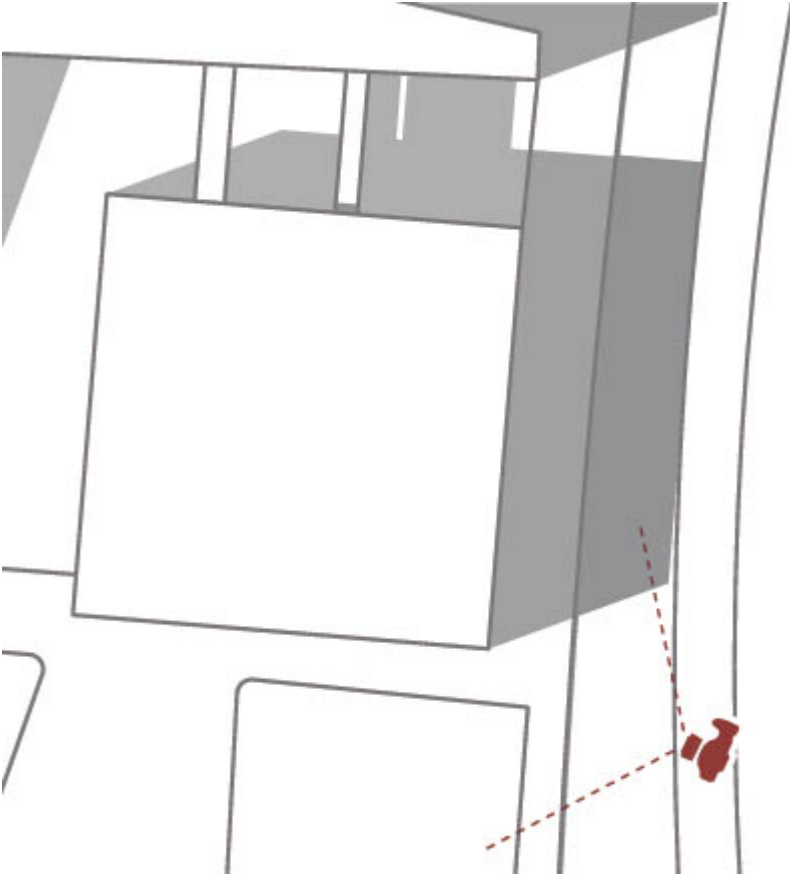
Fig. 136: Here, tight framing and a long lens produce an image dominated almost completely by abstract shapes [focal length: 120mm]



Fig. 137: An ultra-wide-angle shot made necessary by the close proximity of the neighboring buildings [focal length: 14mm]

3.6.2 Short Focal Length Lenses

Medium wide-angle lenses with equivalent focal lengths of between 24mm and 35mm are perfect for producing realistic-looking images of buildings and are firm favorites among architectural photographers.



Ultra-wide-angle lenses are often used if the circumstances force the photographer to shoot from very close to (or inside) a building ([fig. 137](#)), and they make it possible to capture photos that would otherwise be impossible to shoot. But take care: Ultra-wide-angle lenses and short subject distances almost always produce strong perspective distortion and an overemphasized feeling of three-dimensional space. Such effects definitely belong to the more artistic side of architectural photography and can be used to produce dynamic, but not necessarily realistic, architectural photos ([fig. 138](#)).



Fig. 138: The combination of an ultra-wide-angle lens and an unusual camera position produces an extremely dynamic overall effect [focal length: 17mm]

If you are using a wide-angle lens for the first time, you will quickly find that even the smallest movements of the camera away from the

horizontal axis produce strongly converging verticals (fig. 139). It is therefore extremely important to ensure that your camera is aligned correctly if you want to prevent this from happening. Additionally, wide-angle zoom lenses tend to produce pronounced barrel distortion. Correcting these types of effects requires additional cropping during post-processing, so make sure you leave sufficient space around your main subject while shooting (section 4.3.1).



Fig. 139: Rotating the camera slightly downward while using a wide-angle lens produces obvious converging verticals [focal length: 14mm]

Fisheye lenses, with their ultra-short focal lengths and extremely wide angles of view, are rarely used in an architectural context due to the extreme distortion they produce. Fisheye effects are often fascinating at first glance and are great fun to experiment with, but can become quite irritating if they are overused. Nevertheless don't neglect to experiment creatively with fisheye lenses and their unusual angles of view (fig. 140). There are software programs capable of reducing the prominence of fisheye effects, or in some cases of removing them entirely, although not without significant losses in quality around the edges of the image. This method, however, could allow you to create overview shots of an area that simply wouldn't be possible with a normal lens (figs. 141 and 142).



Fig. 140: Fisheye lenses produce extremely distorted views of architectural subjects [15mm full-frame fisheye lens]



Fig. 141: An overview shot created with an ultra wide-angle lens [17 mm focal length]



Fig. 142: An overview image taken with a fisheye lens and then subsequently edited to replicate a more natural visual impression by minimizing the fisheye effect [15mm focal length]



Fig. 143: A planar panorama constructed from three portrait format source images [focal length: 17mm]

3.6.3 Increasing the Angle of View Using Planar and Shift Panorama Techniques

If the focal length of your lens is not short enough to capture the entire subject, you can always shoot a sequence of partial images and merge them together during post-processing ([fig. 143](#); see also section 4.4.1). In order to produce realistic-looking results, it is usually best to stitch your images together to form a flat, or planar, panorama instead of a cylindrical panorama. The latter often have extreme formats and obvious distortion of straight lines outside of the image center. The usable angle of view of a planar panorama is less than 180 degrees.

If you are shooting a panorama handheld, try to rotate your camera around its nodal point (section 3.7.1) rather than around your body's own central axis. This will give you maximum flexibility and a minimum of difficulty when aligning and merging your images later, especially if you are photographing your subject from close up. Of course, it's even more effective and precise to use a panoramic tripod head.

Panorama techniques not only help to increase the realizable angle of view but also can be used to increase image resolution severalfold, which is of particular interest to photographers who want to produce large-scale prints of their work.

A more precise way to increase the angle of view in your photos is to use a shift lens. Simply shoot two (to four) source images using opposite or rotated directions of shift and stitch them together on a computer ([fig. 144](#); see also section 4.4.2). It is extremely important to leave sufficient overlap at the edges of panorama source images. Common sets of panorama source images include two landscape format images merged to produce a 5:2 wide-screen panorama or three portrait format images merged to make an approximately 5:3 panorama. It is also possible to shoot four source images with the lens rotated through 30 degrees up or down. The shooting sequence would then be as follows: top left, bottom right, rotate through 60 degrees counterclockwise, top right, bottom left. The resulting image will have an aspect ratio of about 3:2. For portrait images, rotate the entire system 90 degrees correspondingly. The advantage of this technique is that, unlike when you rotate the camera, the alignment of the camera itself doesn't change, making it easier to merge the resulting images even when outside. However, the objects in the image should be as distant as possible, because even the minimal shift of the lens axis has a negative effect on the appearance of objects close to the lens. The consequence is a slight shift of

the image elements, which of course complicates the stitching process: the closer the elements of your subject are to the camera, the more significant the perspective offset will be, which makes the stitching process complicated and labor intensive. Especially when indoors ([fig. 211](#)), you can quickly reach the limits of this method. Small so-called parallax errors can cause real headaches when stitching images together, but they aren't always easy to detect when working onsite and you usually don't discover them until you're at home working on your computer—and it's too late to take proper counter measures.



Fig. 144: A photo constructed from two source images shot using different shift settings [focal length: 2 x 24mm]

To end up with component images that are free from parallax error, use a shift lens or shift adapter with an integrated or attached tripod socket,

which enables you to shift the camera position while keeping the lens static: the optical axis of the lens remains unaltered, while only the exposure surface (i.e., the sensor or film) shifts through the image circle parallel to the lens plane. Some shift lens adapters allow you to fix the lens in place by using special tripod mounts permitting you to shift the camera freely within certain limits (fig. 145). Lens attachment brackets designed specifically for individual shift lenses are another option (fig. 146). These methods enable you to produce source images with precise overlaps. If your tripod head has a movable quick-release plate, you can achieve the same effect by moving the camera in the opposite direction to the shift that you apply to the lens (horizontal shift), or, if your tripod has a telescopic center column, retracting or extending it against the shift (vertical shift).



Fig. 145: A camera with a shift adapter affixed to a tripod using an L-bracket, allowing the camera to be freely shifted horizontally



Fig. 146: A lens attachment bracket for a shift lens with similar functionality

For both flat and shift panoramas, use the manual exposure mode to ensure that your exposure settings remain constant when shooting both types of panoramas. Differences in exposure between shots cause differences in image brightness in the overlap areas that then have to be corrected manually.

3.7Image Formats

The image format you use can have a significant influence on the way an image is perceived. Landscape format is the most commonly used in architectural photos, as it most closely represents the way we see our surroundings. Portrait format images are used less often, while a square

format (fig. 147) is calmer, and emphasizes neither the vertical nor the horizontal dimension.

The camera's image sensor or film format determines the format of the RAW image data (usually 3:2 or 4:3), although cropping allows you to change the basic dimensions of an image later. Extreme formats and framing that is not aligned with the lines within the subject immediately attract the viewer's attention and signal an unconventional image.

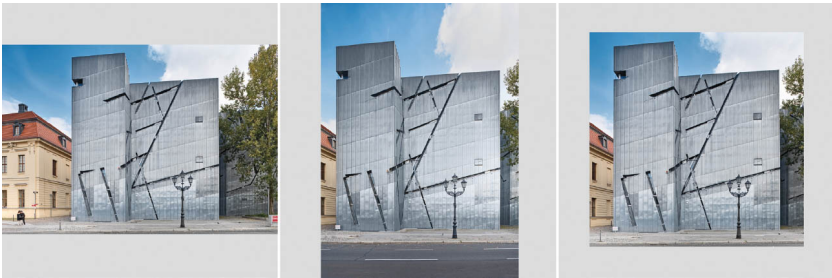


Fig. 147: Landscape, portrait, and square format images of a single subject

3.7.1 Extreme Formats and Panorama Images

A panorama is an image in which one dimension is many times longer than the other, offering the viewer an unusual view of a scene that doesn't correspond to conventional ideas of visual perception (fig. 148). This unusual view also has an effect on the way the subject is perceived. While a heavily cropped image (fig. 149) reproduces a situation in a relatively undistorted fashion, panoramas constructed from multiple source images often portray improbably large vertical or horizontal angles of view (fig. 150).



Fig. 148: The human field of view: approximately 170 degrees horizontally and 130 degrees vertically

In contrast to planar panoramas (section 3.6.3), cylindrical panoramas can cover angles of view as large as 360 degrees and visually distort all horizontal lines that are not located on the horizon (fig. 151). Spherical panoramas are designed for interactive presentation on computer monitors. They cover not only a 360-degree horizontal angle of view, but also 180 degrees vertically and show even more distortion than cylindrical panoramas. Printed spherical panoramas are visually more similar to fisheye photos than to ones shot using ultra-wide-angle lenses, and as such present an unrealistic view of the subject. In architectural situations, this type of panorama is not used to accurately reproduce the proportions of a building, but serve more to squeeze a complete overview of a broad scene into a single image. The major characteristics of successful panoramas are invisible seams and a composition that effectively uses the entire available space within the elongated frame.

So how do we go about creating a panorama? A tripod is an essential tool for the creation of cylindrical panoramas made up of multiple source images. Precise horizontal camera alignment makes it easier to merge the source images later and avoids converging verticals. Shooting in portrait format helps to cover the maximum possible vertical angle of view, and the best way to do this is using either a simple L-bracket (section 2.5.3) or a

custom panoramic head designed for use with your specific combination of camera and lens. A high quality panoramic head can be adjusted to rotate around the nodal point of one or a number of camera/lens combinations. The nodal point is the point around which you need to rotate your camera to produce precisely superimposed overlaps between the individual source images. A tripod head with a built-in spirit level and 360-degree scale is a great aid to producing precisely aligned and overlapped panorama source images. Some DSLRs have grids that can be displayed in the viewfinder or on the monitor, and these too, help to align the camera during a panoramic shoot. Accessory focusing screens with etched-in grids are available for digital and analog SLR cameras. The focus area indicators in your camera's viewfinder also make a useful impromptu alignment aid. Panoramic source images should be shot using the same exposure values, but if the light conditions vary too much, you can also use exposure compensation values to counteract the effects. Keep in mind, that this will make it more difficult to stitch the images together manually. However, stitching software is quickly becoming increasingly powerful, and many programs offer compensation functionality that automatically balances the lighting in a stitched image. Remember that clouds moving across the sky can shade the sun during a shoot and cause significant differences in exposure between shots. Make sure that no moving objects lie in the overlap areas between shots, as these are sure to produce anomalies that are difficult to retouch later.

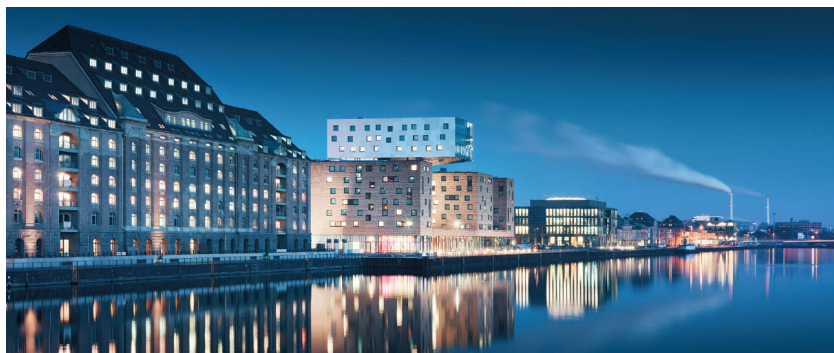


Fig. 149: A single image formatted by means of heavy horizontal cropping



Fig. 150: A planar panorama constructed from four source images [focal length: 4 x 24mm]

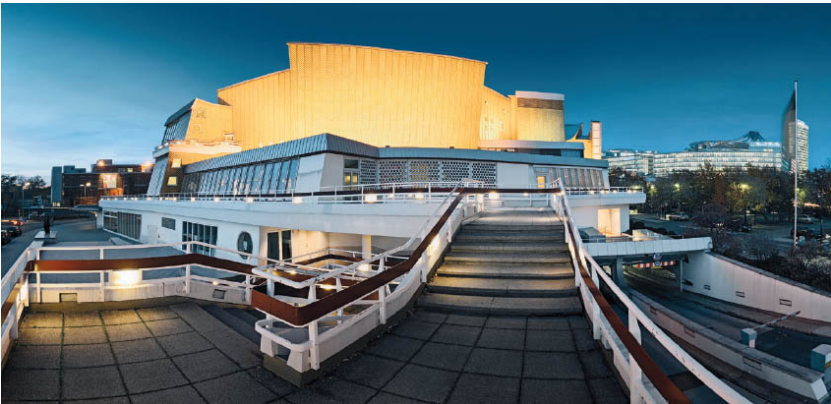


Fig. 151: A cylindrical panorama: horizontal lines not located directly on the horizon are visibly distorted

3.7.2 Image Orientation

Every rectangular image has an aspect ratio that determines whether it is viewed in landscape or portrait format. Buildings that are broader than they are high are therefore usually photographed in landscape format, while

those with a dominant vertical orientation are generally portrayed in portrait format. This means that the image format is usually a function of a building's form and is intended to produce an image that portrays it without imposing any visual constraints.

However, if the photographer wishes to include additional elements of a building's surroundings in the image, this can reduce the dominance of the building itself within the composition and alter the required image format. A second major element in an image can completely change its perceived orientation ([fig. 152](#)).

If you deliberately use a format that doesn't mirror the structure of the subject, you will create an image with additional tension that can significantly alter the way the subject is perceived. The image format can be used to intentionally provide a counterpoint to the architecture itself ([figs. 153](#) and [154](#)). Using this type of technique, the photographer can influence the composition and emphasize relationships and contradictions within the frame. In such cases, the architecture can even take on a role that is secondary to the composition of the image itself, once again indicating an artistic approach to architectural photography.



Fig. 152: In this example, an additional compositional element (the aircraft) determines the format of the finished image

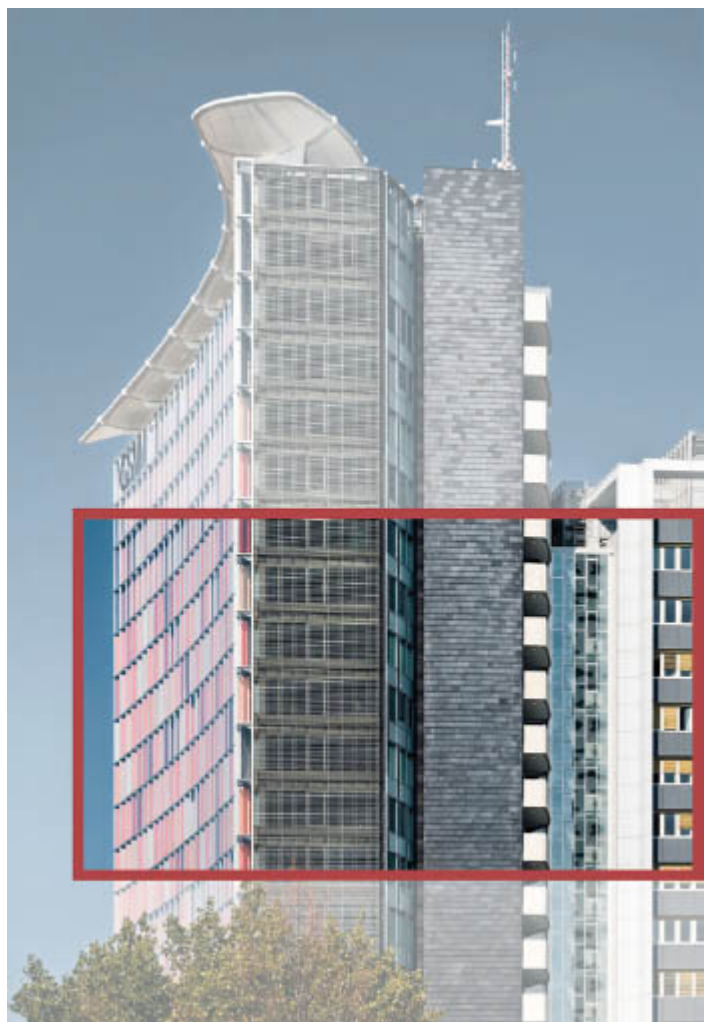


Fig. 153: Overview

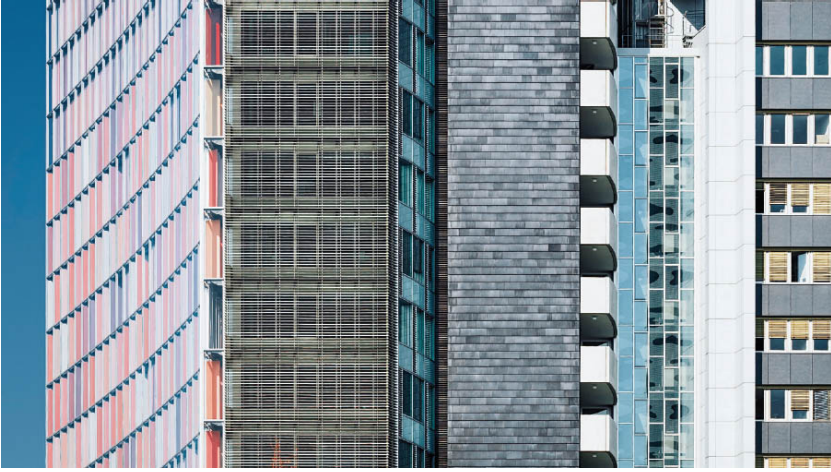


Fig. 154: The vertical nature of the building's structure is counteracted by the landscape format of the image

3.8Composition and Framing

Every photographer should consider the composition and framing of an image before shooting. You can, of course, crop an image later, but the cornerstone of a successful image is always laid before the shutter button is pressed. It is essential to consider how the interplay between objects, shapes, lines, and spatial relations in an image can be brought together to form a suspenseful but effective whole. The aim of a great photo should be to captivate the viewer using a composition that complements the overall effect of the image. This means that an image can contain obvious visual contradictions without losing its overall effectiveness. On the other hand, a failed composition can make even the most spectacular building look dull or even unattractive.

3.8.1Composition

There is no simple formula for composing a great photograph. Locating the subject in the center of the frame produces a balanced, but often static-looking image. This type of composition is often used by documentary architectural photographers ([fig. 155](#)). A central location is essential if you want to produce a precisely symmetrical view of a building (section 3.5.4).

As in other genres, architectural photographers often choose non-central compositions in order to produce more interesting images. The **Golden Ratio** and the **Rule of Thirds** are two rules of thumb often used to aid successful image composition ([page 116](#)), and which produce balanced but interesting images ([fig. 156](#)). But sometimes, the most impressive images are those that simply ignore the rules of photography, aesthetics, and artistic proportions ([figs. 15](#) and [157](#)). Extreme images like these have to be very carefully composed in order to be effective, and the difference between a sophisticated and a failed composition can be very fine. Architectural photos portray physically large subjects that take up a large proportion of the available space within the frame, and it's all too easy to spoil the visual balance in an image by putting too much emphasis on a single part of the frame.



Fig. 155: A calm, static composition enhanced by the central position of the building within the frame



Fig. 156: A dynamic, suspenseful composition that follows the golden ratio rule



Fig. 157: Here, an extremely one-sided composition provides us with a very unusual image

In a photo, a building doesn't always have to be visible in its entirety. Parts of a structure that are less relevant to the overall effect can be

completely left out. Even a partially visible façade can deliver sufficient information to enable the viewer to interpret the building correctly, and a carefully chosen viewpoint can often reveal a more interesting view than a conventional full-frontal shot (fig. 158). In such cases, you can do well to remember Robert Capa's famous quote: "If your pictures aren't good enough, you're not close enough."

The importance of the use of space within a composition is often underestimated. Space is an important part of all architectural structures, and a photo of a building needs room to breathe. If an architectural photo is too tightly cropped, it will create a cramped, unfavorable impression (fig. 159). Always try to see emptiness as unconfined space and actively incorporate it into your compositions (fig. 160).



Fig. 158: A composition with partially visible façades

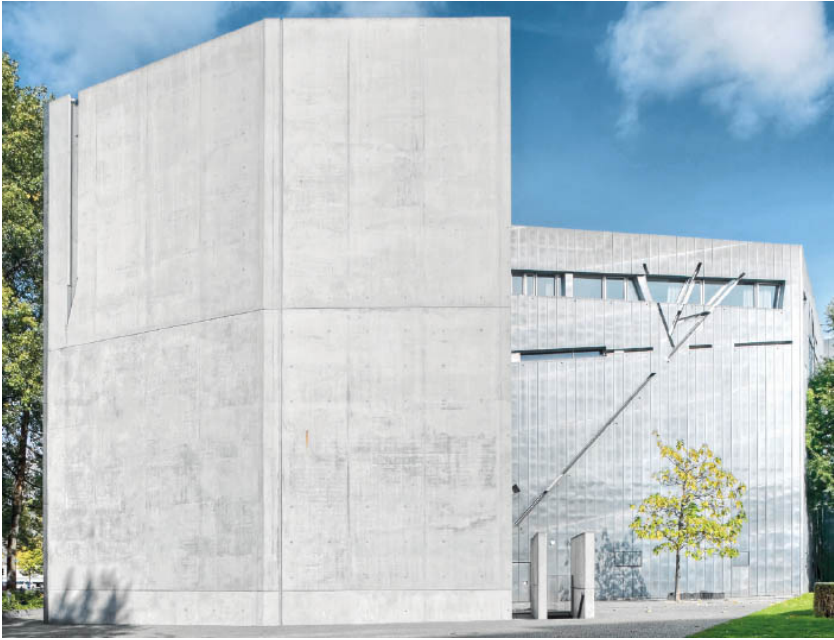


Fig. 159: The extreme crop gives this image a cramped feel

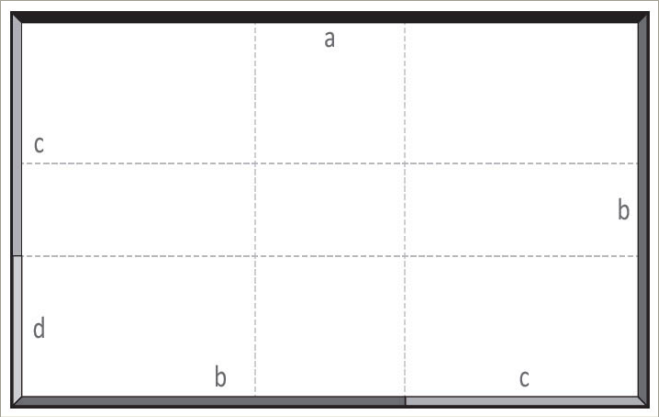


Fig. 160: Composing around empty space

The Golden Ratio and the Rule of Thirds

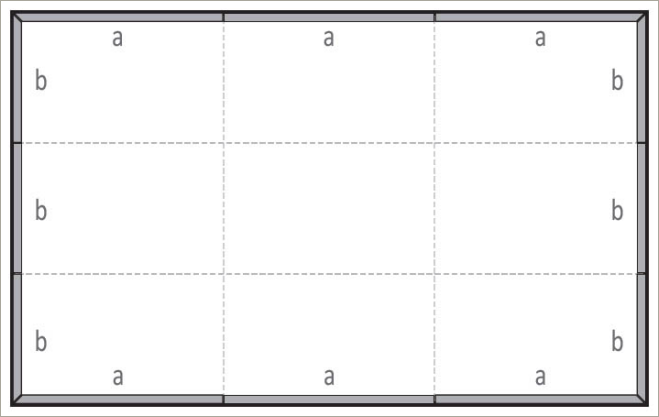
The Golden Ratio is a ratio (1 : 1618) that is widely used in the arts

and architecture to symbolize ideal proportions and harmonious aesthetics. Compositions that adhere to the Golden Ratio are the basis for many successful architectural photos.



$$a : b = b : c = c : d = 1.618$$

The Rule of Thirds is a similar rule of thumb that conceptually divides the area of an image vertically and horizontally into thirds, resulting in nine equal parts. If you compose your image so that important details or features lie on the imaginary dividing lines between the segments, the result is usually pleasing and balanced.



3.8.2 Composition and a Subject's Surroundings

Architecture and its surroundings influence each other to equal degrees, so it's important to consider in advance whether or not you want to include a building's surroundings in a photo ([fig. 161](#)). The elements in question include static objects such as trees, streetlights, walls, and signs, as well as moving objects such as people, cars, and clouds. Including such elements makes it easier for the viewer to interpret an image of a building, but can also have the opposite effect by making it appear too cluttered.



Fig. 161: Elements of the surroundings influence the overall impression made by a building



Fig. 162: A clearly structured composition with no additional elements produces a clean, clinical-looking image



Fig. 163: Surrounding objects breathe life into this image

Stationary Image Elements

It's important to have an idea of how you want to portray a building before you begin a shoot. If you want to create a clear, clinical look, you will need to reduce all distractions to a minimum and exclude any extraneous objects from the frame (fig. 162). Such an image has a clear message but can appear distanced. On the other hand, it is easy to positively influence the message communicated by a photo by selectively including external elements in your composition, which convey the character of a location (fig. 163). Including parts of a building's surroundings in an image is by no means just a compromise necessitated by a lack of space (section 3.5.3). Rather, it can be a deliberate technique of composition. For example, the purpose of an airport control tower only becomes evident when its surroundings are visible too, and a bridge only has meaning if it is photographed with the space it spans. Additional objects can also breathe life into an otherwise sterile image and provide accents that give the viewer more information about the subject's context. External objects can also serve as a yardstick for judging the size of a building (fig. 164). Artistic architectural photographers often use additional visual elements to emphasize the relationships between a building and its surroundings (fig. 165).



Fig. 164: Additional objects give clues regarding the scale of the subject



Fig. 165: A silhouetted Image that includes elements of the surroundings in the composition

People and Other Moving Objects

People, cars, and other moving objects only appear for a very short time in a subject's surroundings, making it relatively simple to deliberately include or exclude them from a composition (figs. 166 and 167).

The inclusion of people in architectural photos is the subject of much debate, as they can influence the dynamics of an architectural scene in both positive and negative ways. Historically, people were usually deliberately left out of architectural compositions, particularly in the genre's infancy because of the technical limitations imposed by the long shutter speeds used by the equipment of the day. The fact that a building has no purpose without the presence of people makes this practice particularly ironic, although the presence of people in architectural images can distract the viewer from the main subject.

Contemporary architectural photographers generally leave people out of their compositions less often than their predecessors did. People are often used to add movement and vitality to a scene (fig. 168) and can be used selectively to make context and scale easier to interpret (fig. 169). If people are to be visible in an architectural photo, they should be located close to the building to ensure that the proportions in the finished image are realistic. Human subjects that are portrayed too close to the camera appear disproportionately large and tend to distract the viewer's attention from the building itself.



Fig. 166: People used as an additional compositional element



Fig. 167: The same composition, but with people deliberately left out



Fig. 168: In this example, people liven up the overall image



Fig. 169: Selective use of a human element to illustrate scale



Fig. 170: An image showing an interaction between a man and a building

The interaction between people and buildings is a characteristic of the artistic side of architectural photography. In such photos, the building alone is no longer the center of attention (section 3.2), and the photos illustrate

relationships between people and objects rather than just the objects themselves (fig. 170). Examples of this type of photo are ones that clearly illustrate the difference in size between a person and a building or ones that show unusual or odd situations (fig. 171). Other examples of this type of counterpoint are photos that show well-dressed people in front of ruined architecture or persons in Halloween costumes standing in front of a modern skyscraper. Such photos represent a mixture of architectural and portrait photography, so if you are in any doubt, you should always obtain permission to publish from any people who appear in your photos.

In the case of other moving objects, such as cars or clouds (fig. 150), it is often worth waiting to see if the situation changes for the better. Parked cars often block the view of a building and are impossible to remove in post-processing. In such cases, you can either regard a car as a stationary object and use it as part of the overall composition (fig. 180) or revisit the same location later (figs. 172 and 173). For business locations, early mornings and weekends tend to be ideal times because you can avoid commuter traffic. The only other alternative is to select a different location altogether. Like stationary objects, moving objects are an additional stylistic element often used by artistic architectural photographers (fig. 174).



Fig. 171: A moment captured: the mix of a person and architectural objects complete the composition



Fig. 172: Parked vehicles block the view of the building



Fig. 173: The same building, photographed later



Fig. 174: Deliberate use of a moving object as a stylistic device in an architectural photo [1.5 sec. at f/11 and ISO 100, ND filter]

3.8.3 Selective Framing

A photographer can use tight or selective framing to emphasize particular

details or characteristics of a building. This eliminates subsidiary information regarding the size and overall shape of a building and draws the viewer's attention to specific architectural details. This way, the material nature of a façade (fig. 175) and the precise construction of particular features are much easier to discern, while the overall structure of the building takes on a secondary role (fig. 176).



Fig. 175: A tight crop accentuates the nature of the building materials [focal length: 100mm]



Fig. 176: Substructures within a building's overall shape are accentuated by tight framing [focal length: 24mm]

3.9Camera Settings

The three variable camera settings involved in every photo are shutter speed, aperture, and ISO (film or sensor) sensitivity. The optimum

combination of all three ensures correct exposure. As a genre, architectural photography offers little space for experimentation in regard to exposure, and it is essential to expose your photos according to the lighting on site if you want to produce usable images that are easy to process.

3.9.1 Shutter Speed

Due to the static nature of buildings, shutter speeds (or exposure times, as they are often referred to in digital circles) play only a secondary role in architectural photography. Buildings are not subject to motion blur like many other subjects, so if you use a tripod, your shutter speed will be your most flexible camera setting. If you use long shutter speeds, moving objects such as people or cars end up looking like blurred stripes, which makes them less of a distraction in the finished image. Moving objects can help make an architectural photo look more dynamic and less sterile (fig. 177), and the inclusion of moving people can help illustrate their interaction with the architecture. Moving people create visible blurs and are differentiated from people who are standing still. The longer the shutter speed, the fainter the traces of movement become, so using extremely long shutter speeds is an effective way to make moving objects completely invisible.



Fig. 177: Long shutter speeds make movements visible [0.8 sec. at f/8 and ISO 100].

3.9.2 Aperture

In architectural situations, it is usually advisable to use a medium to small aperture to ensure sufficient depth of field and to keep lens errors to a minimum. Most wide-angle lenses produce their best frame-wide sharpness at apertures between $f/8$ and $f/11$, while very bright lenses (i.e., those with very large maximum apertures) produce their best sharpness at around $f/4$.

Standard and telephoto lenses often require the use of very small apertures to produce sufficient depth of field. The problem here is that small apertures cause diffraction-based artifacts. This diffraction blur is directly related to the physical size of the aperture opening—the smaller it is, the more likely it is that diffraction blur will occur. The density of pixels on a digital image sensor also plays a significant role in image sharpness. Diffraction blur is more likely to occur in photos shot using a sensor made up of small pixels because the circles of confusion produced by diffraction are more likely to intersect with multiple, neighboring pixels. The smallest aperture that doesn't cause diffraction-based blur is referred to as the

“diffraction limit” and lies between $f/8$ and $f/11$ for DSLRs with high pixel-density image sensors, while most full-frame DSLRs and medium format digital cameras can be stopped down to $f/11$ or $f/16$ without causing a visible reduction in sharpness.

Every architectural photo involves finding the right compromise between the maximum possible depth of field and a minimum of diffraction blur and lens errors. This generally means using an aperture of $f/8$ or $f/11$.

Departing from these guidelines in specific instances, however, can be advisable. You may want to use a wide aperture and a shallow depth of field as a deliberate technique to highlight a specific part of a building while letting other parts disappear into blur. You generally have to be relatively close to your subject in order to create this effect ([fig. 178](#)), however, you should understand that architecture often appears unusual and even strange when subjected to this treatment. On the other hand, it can sometimes be advantageous to exploit the diffraction blurring that occurs with narrow apertures when shooting problematic subjects with fine geometric textures to avoid moiré effect—especially when using an image sensor that doesn’t have a low-pass filter. You can also deliberately stop down the lens to create starburst effects when working with a scene containing reflections of the sun off of glass surfaces or when shooting a nighttime subject that contains bright points of light. Using apertures of $f/16$ and narrower tend to produce defined starbursts ([fig. 179](#)).

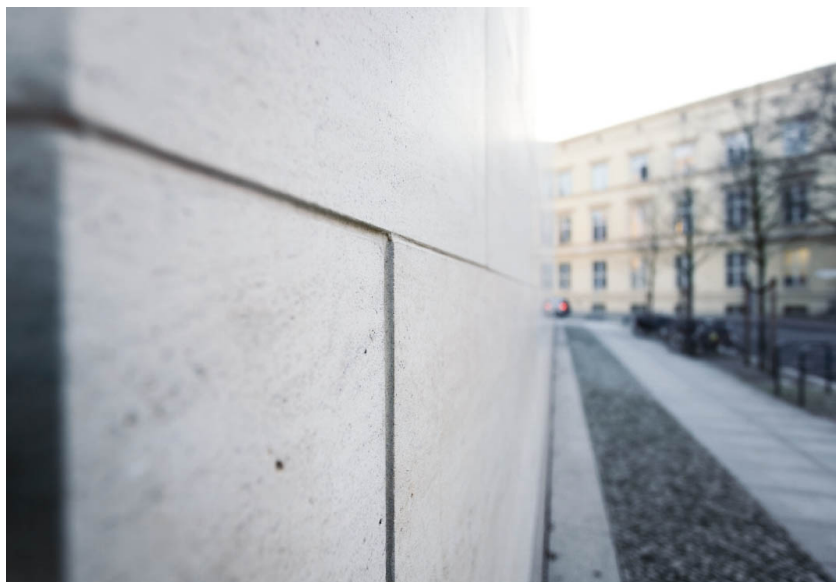


Fig. 178: Large apertures produce shallow depth of field. Here, the viewer's attention is automatically drawn to the joint between the stones [focal length: 21mm, 1/60 sec. at f/2.8 and ISO 100].



Fig. 179: A starburst effect produced in a glass facade with a significantly stopped-down lens [24mm focal length, 1/60 sec. at f/18 and ISO 100]

3.9.3 ISO Sensitivity

I recommend that you use the minimum possible ISO value in your architectural photos, regardless of whether you are shooting digitally or using an analog camera. Low-sensitivity analog film produces maximum sharpness with minimum grain, theoretically making it possible to generate large prints of heavily cropped image details. However, in practice it is cheaper and more practical to use high-quality ISO 100 or 200 film, and you should only use more sensitive film if you want to use visible grain as a stylistic device in your images (fig. 180). Slide films are generally not good at reproducing strong light/dark contrasts and are not particularly useful in architectural situations.



Fig. 180: An image that uses the grain effect of high-sensitivity black-and-white film as an intrinsic part of the composition

Using low ISO values with **digital image sensors** reduces the risk of noise artifacts spoiling your images and gives you the greatest possible dynamic range and headroom for adjusting incorrectly exposed images later on. Some DSLRs offer super-low ISO settings that are theoretically a whole f-stop lower than the default value, but which are only achieved using electronic trickery without producing real increases in image quality.

The process involves recording an image that is deliberately overexposed by one f-stop and then automatically corrected by the camera's firmware. This reduces the available dynamic range and should be avoided in high-contrast situations. If you need to use long shutter speeds, it is always better to use a neutral density filter.

3.9.4 Exposure

A camera's automatic exposure metering system uses the selected ISO value as a basis for calculating the optimum combination of aperture and shutter speed for the center-weighted, spot, or matrix area being metered. Generally, architectural photographers aim to produce photos that are consistently exposed across the entire frame, with no obvious burned-out highlights or blocked-up shadows. To achieve this, it is best to use center-weighted or matrix exposure metering, as these—in contrast to spot metering mode—meter for the entire frame. However, automatic systems aren't perfect, and it is sometimes necessary to make manual corrections to automatically calculated exposure settings. Even small reflections can cause the camera to underexpose the whole image. Most digital cameras include histogram functionality to help you judge exposure ([page 157](#)). This is often much more accurate than using the camera's monitor, which is only capable of displaying low-quality images and is subject to color shifts at acute viewing angles.

The prevailing weather and the position of the sun have a significant influence on the exposure values you can use. Contrast is generally low in overcast situations, and it is often advisable to increase contrast artificially for photos taken in such situations—in other words, to “stretch” the histogram. The contrast between the darkest and lightest parts of an image is much greater in direct sunlight. If the sun is behind you, it is relatively simple to produce correctly exposed images. The direct lighting causes some shadows, but leaves buildings showing pleasantly high contrast against relatively dark skies ([fig. 181](#)). It is easier to find the right exposure values for the entire frame in situations like this than it is in backlit situations. The façade of a backlit building will be in the shade and will often display very low contrast ([section 3.12.2](#)), while the sky is often overexposed to a degree that overshoots the camera or the film's available dynamic range, producing large, washed out areas in the finished image ([fig. 182](#)). Many automatic exposure systems compensate automatically for backlight, but end up underexposing the main subject as a result. Again,

you can compensate for such anomalies manually, but there are limits to what you can effectively achieve as contrast remains high whatever you do. If you cannot avoid shooting into the sun, shoot a bracketing sequence (section 3.9.5) and use the results to create a super-high-contrast HDR or DRI image later during post-processing (fig. 183). A graduated filter can also help in some backlit situations (section 3.10 and fig. 184).



Fig. 181: The position of the sun behind the photographer produces a high-contrast façade against a dark sky [1/125 sec. at f/11 and ISO 100]



Fig. 182: In this image, backlight gives us a low-contrast façade and an overexposed sky [1/60 sec. at f/11 and ISO 100]



Fig. 183: A DRI image constructed from a bracketing sequence mitigates the problems caused by backlighting [1/10, 1/40, and 1/160 sec. at f/11 and ISO 100]



Fig. 184: Using a graduated filter to counteract the problems caused by backlighting [1/40 sec. at f/11 and ISO 100]



Fig. 185: Using DRI techniques enabled us to produce balanced exposure across the entire frame

3.9.5 Using Bracketing Sequences to Create HDR or DRI Images

HDR (High Dynamic Range) or DRI (Dynamic Range Increase) images are constructed from multiple source images taken using varying exposure values and then merging those images to create a single image using

proprietary software. This makes it possible to reproduce a dynamic range greater than what your camera can normally capture in a single image (also section 4.5). In professional architectural photography, HDR or DRI images shouldn't be immediately recognizable as such and should provide evenly lit representations without obvious under or overexposure (fig. 185). If you overdo HDR or DRI effects, you run the risk of producing an artificial-looking image that looks more like a painting—with pronounced microcontrast, exaggerated colors, and unnatural brightness profiles—than a photograph, with the subject taking on a role that is subordinate to the effect itself (fig. 186). Ideally, you should use a tripod to ensure that the source images in your sequence are identically framed. Select exposure increments of $-1/0/+1$ or $-2/0/+2$ LV (1 LV = one f-stop) depending on the situation. These values represent underexposure, normal exposure, and overexposure and are called a bracketed sequence. Always shoot bracketed sequences using a fixed aperture value and a variable shutter speed. If possible, shoot bracketed sequences in continuous shooting mode—this ensures that your source images are taken within the shortest possible space of time and reduces the risk of objects within the frame moving between shots. If you are shooting at night, use mirror lock-up to prevent the movement of the camera's mirror from causing camera shake.

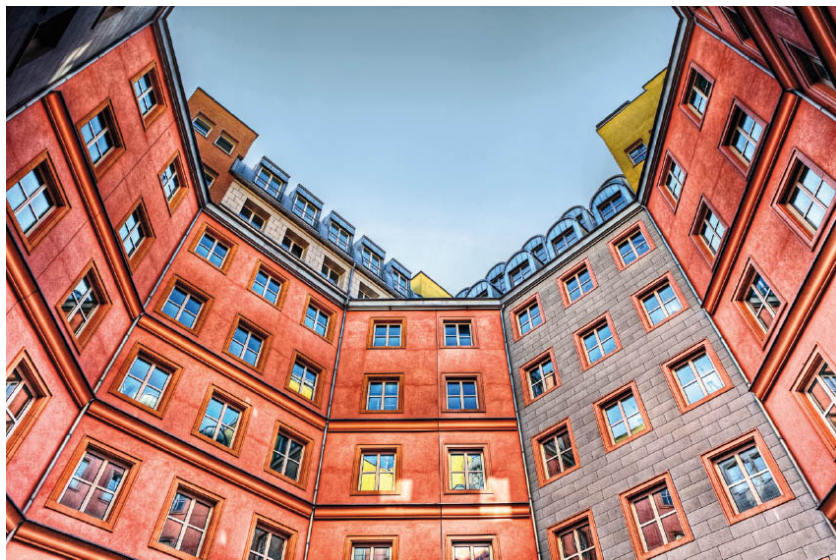


Fig. 186: The tone mapping effect in this image is too strong

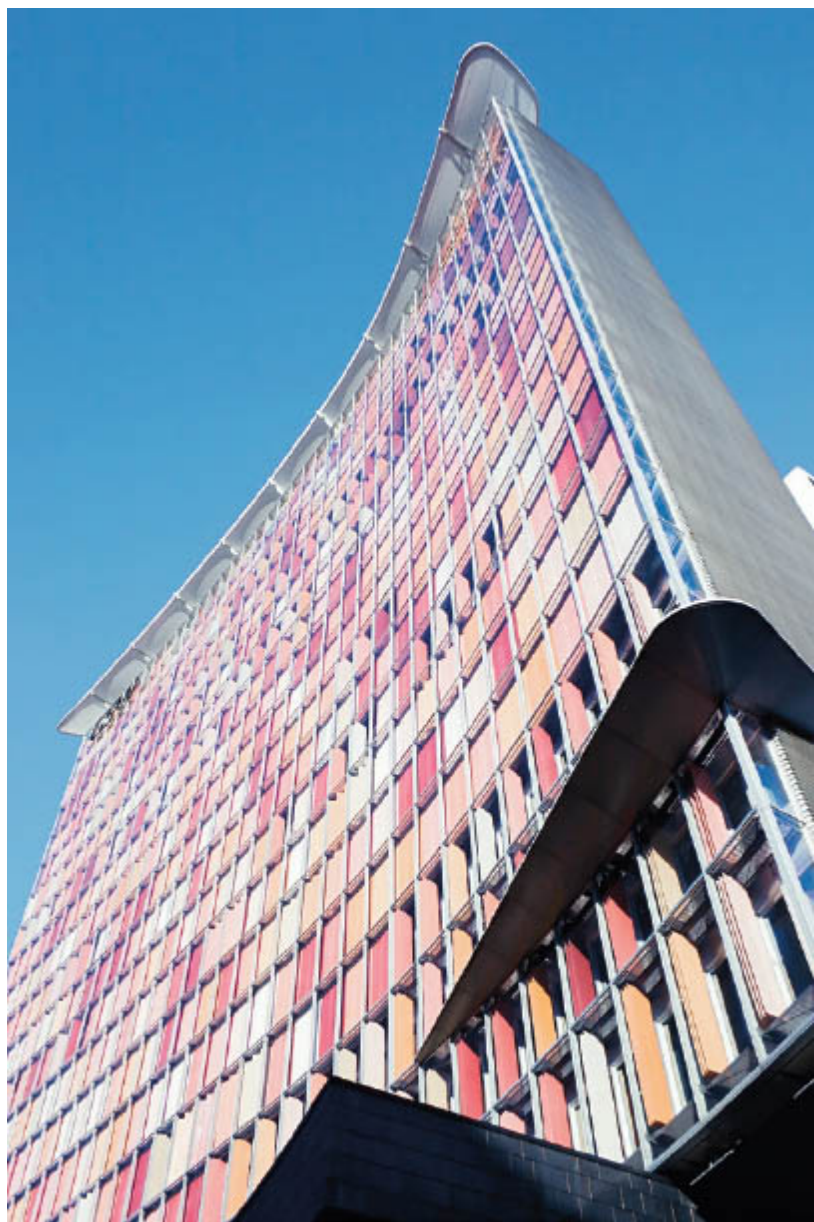


Fig. 187: Use of a circular polarizing filter: the sky remains bright, and there are no visible reflections in the façade



Fig. 188: Rotating the polarizing filter through 45 degrees darkens the sky but makes the reflections in the windows visible

3.10Using Filters

Filters can be used to produce, enhance, or prevent certain optical effects (section 2.5.6). Rotating **polarizing filters** are used to prevent unwanted reflections in smooth, nonmetallic surfaces or to intensify the blue of the sky (figs. 187 and 188). **Graduated filters** are a great aid to producing balanced exposures in extreme high-contrast situations; they function by partially darkening part of the image area (usually the sky). They are only really effective in situations where the exposure between two clearly differentiated bright and dark areas needs to be equalized (figs. 189 and 190). **Neutral density (ND) filters** are color neutral and reduce the amount of light entering the lens by a preset factor. This makes it possible to use much longer shutter speeds than would otherwise be possible in brightly lit situations, which means you can depict moving cars or people with deliberate blur, for example (fig. 191), or you can let them pass entirely out of the image composition with very long shutter speeds.



Fig. 189: An exposure without graduated filter: the foreground is correctly exposed but the brightly-lit building is overexposed, which is clearly visible in the histogram [aperture 9, 1/160 sec, ISO 100]



Fig. 190: An exposure using a graduated filter: The filter was turned slightly to the right so that it didn't affect the bottom quarter of the image. The slightly longer exposure time rendered the foreground only slightly brighter, while the filter darkened the upper part of the image enough to create a well-balanced exposure [aperture 9, 1/100 sec, ISO 100].



Fig. 191: Using an ND filter while shooting during the day in order to achieve motion blur by slowing down the shutter speed [2 sec. at f/11 and ISO 80, ND2 neutral density filter]

Working Deliberately

Digital photographers don't incur any additional costs to take additional photographs. This simple fact all too often means that quantity takes precedence over quality. We often neglect to take a step back and think through a shot because we succumb to the pressure of hunting down yet another perspective or subject—there is, after all, no cost for doing so. But this habit often leads us to work less deliberately, leaving us with a larger number of images but few that actually have compelling compositions or thoughtful messages. Take the time before you shoot your first exposure to consider what angles of view are absolutely essential to achieve your desired purpose. Once you've invested the time to analyze the

spatial qualities of your subject, you'll be able to eliminate some perspectives that would be less successful than others. You might come to the conclusion, for example, that while one perspective might theoretically result in an extraordinary image, in reality it might only produce mediocre results due to distracting surrounding elements, undesirable lighting, or the inability to frame a certain facade desirably.

The time you save up front by eliminating some angles of view can then be invested in the productive tasks of giving thoughtful consideration to your composition, fine-tuning your camera's orientation, and waiting for the best possible moment to release the shutter. With more time allotted for each of your shots, you'll be able to experiment with extra techniques such as using ND filters. All of these recommendations apply to indoor photography as well, where you can also make use of your extra time to arrange the interior furnishings perfectly for the specific angle of view you choose.



Fig. 192: Interior photography captures an enclosed space and the objects within it

3.11Interior Architectural Photography

An interior shoot differs from an exterior shoot in various fundamental ways. Indoors, the space in which the photographer can move is limited, and it is impossible to communicate information about the size, shape, or exterior form of a building. Exterior shots portray a solid body that fills space, whereas interior shots portray the space enclosed by an external structure. In interior situations, the volume, sequence, and intersection of the room(s) determine the nature of the photo ([fig. 192](#)).

3.11.1 Interior Subjects

Interior architectural photos portray enclosed space within a building, and the architecture that encloses the space is usually complemented by functional furnishings or ornamental interior decoration ([fig. 193](#)). It is rare that photographers are offered the opportunity to photograph unfurnished interiors. Interior architectural photos no longer revolve around the overall structure of the building and accents provided by the fixtures and fittings take on greater significance.



Fig. 193: This shot illustrates a successful interplay between architecture and interior design



Fig. 194: Everyday objects immediately attract the viewer's attention



Fig. 195: An interior shot, where superfluous furniture and many everyday objects have been removed

The complexity and condition of the fixtures and fittings have a

significant effect on the overall mood of the image. The emphasis on the architecture will be less in a photo of a room that is obviously lived-in and looks as if someone has only recently left. These types of photos are more often found in lifestyle magazines than in architectural publications. Familiar everyday objects such as newspapers, paintings, fruit bowls, or potted plants immediately grab a viewer's attention (fig. 194), so it is no surprise that purely architectural interior shots often appear almost clinically uncluttered (fig. 195). Qualities such as livability and coziness are not crucial for capturing purely architectural elements. A misplaced plant that detracts from the intended effect of the room's design is like a red rag to a bull for most architects. Superfluous furniture and everyday objects are removed from purely architectural interiors before a shoot, and only a very few objects that set subtle accents become part of the final image (fig. 196). Generally, any object that doesn't help illustrate a room's purpose should not find its way into the shot.

It is essential to consider how you want to portray a space and how a photo will be used before starting a shoot. You can then arrange the space and its contents—there is sure to be something in a room that doesn't fit into the overall concept. Carry a cleaning cloth for removing dust and grease, as there will always be fingerprints or smudges on smooth or polished surfaces. It is much easier to remove these blemishes before a shoot than it is to retouch them digitally. The same is true for dust and dirt on floors. Once your scene is clean, you can arrange the remaining objects to suit your particular purposes (fig. 197). Chairs that aren't quite aligned with a vanishing point axis or tables that are not quite aligned with a wall can cause unwanted tension in an image and quickly make a scene look cluttered. You have to either arrange everything perfectly or break all the rules by deliberately arranging things out of kilter to attract attention. For example, a photo of a dining table and chairs can be enlivened by moving a single chair slightly to face the camera. However, if you are in any doubt, leave things tidy—a badly placed accent can spoil an interior image to a much greater degree than a nonexistent one.



Fig. 196: An interior shot with few visual accents



Fig. 197: An interior shot that includes a number of carefully arranged props



Fig. 198: An unconventional subject often makes for an interesting image

By now, you will have realized that a photographer not only has to successfully bring the architecture to the fore, but also the relationship between the building and the objects and fittings within it. As is the case with exterior situations, in photos of interiors it is not the nature of the subject, but rather the feeling communicated by the image, that determines whether a photo is successful. Unusual subjects often make exceptional photos ([fig. 198](#)) but tend to appear rather abstract.



Fig. 199: Central perspective gives this shot a clean, uncluttered look [focal length: 17mm]

3.11.2 Perspective and Standpoint

In interior situations, the photographer is located within the space that is to be photographed—a situation that severely limits movement and the number of potential locations for the camera. In order to produce sufficient subject distance and a realistic-looking image, you will often have to stand with your back against a wall or shoot through doors or other gaps in the architecture.

Interior spaces usually have square or rectangular floor plans, giving the photographer the basic choice of shooting with a central or a two-point perspective (also section 3.3.1). A **central perspective** photo (fig. 199) involves positioning the camera along the room's central axis and shooting in the direction of the far wall. The wall is oriented parallel to the sensor/film plane, limiting the depth, and preventing the appearance of converging lines within the wall. This type of composition works well in small rooms, although the overall effect is not particularly dynamic. The larger a room, the more distance you have from the camera to the far wall and the more

accentuated the feeling of depth will be. In very large rooms, the walls' strongly converging horizontal lines contribute to the dynamic effect of the resulting image. This effect is particularly strong in images of symmetrical spaces that are shot to emphasize their symmetry.



Fig. 200: The same room photographed using two-point perspective. The overall effect is much more dynamic, and all horizontal lines converge toward the vanishing points [focal length: 17mm]

In order to create a photo with **two-point perspective**, we have to shoot diagonally into the space. This means that all nonvertical lines converge towards imaginary vanishing points on the (usually invisible) horizon and contribute to the feeling of style and depth (fig. 200). However, this type of image is sometimes too dramatic and can result in inharmonious compositions, especially in narrow spaces. The viewpoint you choose will depend not only on how you wish the finished image to look, but also on physical limitations, such as the arrangement of the furniture or fittings. You may find that it is simply impossible to shoot using central perspective because the corresponding parts of the room are full, or because a central viewpoint would produce unwanted reflections that require subsequent retouching (figs. 201 and 202). The direction from which light enters the

space or the presence of mixed light sources will also influence your choice of standpoint.



Fig. 201: Overview of a space photographed using central perspective. This results in unwanted reflections of the camera and tripod.



Fig. 202: The same space photographed using two-point perspective. This version contains no unwanted reflections but produces a very different perspective effect.



Fig. 203: Edges and contours that are useful for orienting your camera (red) and those that are less suitable (blue)

Converging verticals are less of a problem in interior situations than they can be when shooting outdoors. This is because the difference between the height of the space being photographed and the vertical scope of the image is much less pronounced compared to an exterior shot. Interior shots contain fewer important visual elements in the upper parts of the frame, so it is easier to keep the camera level than it is in exterior situations. However, it is just as important to ensure that your camera is aligned correctly or that it will be possible to correct converging verticals later on. Even slightly off-kilter verticals quickly make interior shots look strange. In addition to inspecting your vertical lines, you also need to ensure that the horizon line, even though it is generally not visible for interior shoots, runs level through your image. In other words, every point at camera level must maintain the same height on a virtual horizontal line or your image of an interior will feel tilted. If you're shooting with a level camera, any vertical edges or seams will serve as a compositional aide as will horizontal lines that are at a right angle with respect to the camera. Take care when using furnishings, fixtures, and any potentially movable object to orient your camera, however, because these elements are often not properly aligned

(fig. 203).



Fig. 204: Converging verticals are used as part of the composition in this photo of a high ceiling [focal length: 17mm]

An exception to this rule occurs when we are photographing the interiors of churches and other extremely high-ceilinged spaces. In this case, we encounter similar problems with regard to converging verticals as we do when photographing very tall buildings from the outside. A shift lens can be an enormous help, and if all else fails, you can simply make the converging verticals part of your composition (fig. 204). Some outdoor subjects, such as market squares or enclosed courtyards, exhibit characteristics that are more similar to an indoor than an outdoor shoot, and need to be handled as such.

Shooting at eye level (approximately 6 ft above floor level) produces natural-looking interior shots (fig. 205). The viewer usually instinctively assumes that interior shots have been taken from this position, and you can make low-ceilinged rooms appear more spacious if you shoot from slightly lower (between about 3 ft and 4 ft above the floor). It won't be immediately obvious in the final image that you have moved the perspective down a bit, making the ceiling look relatively higher with respect to the lowered (virtual) horizon. However, lower camera positions also increase the risk of some objects within the space blocking the view of others. You should also

consider, for example, whether the view under a table is preferable to the view along its surface. Only shoot from above eye level if you have to—for example, to prevent a piece of furniture or an architectural feature from spoiling your composition. Shooting above eye level can also be necessary if you need to emphasize the depth of distant objects within a space.



Fig. 205: Shooting at eye level gives a photo a natural look and feel [focal length: 24mm]

3.11.3Focal Length

Because of the limited space available and the restrictions this makes on your choice of camera position, wide-angle lenses are the best choice for shooting interior scenes. Their large angles of view combined with short subject distances often create an impression of space that exceeds that of the room being photographed, which can produce photos with misleading proportions. In contrast to most exterior situations, in which realistic reproduction of size and space are very important, most architectural photographers accept the disproportionate nature of interior shots, especially as this rarely spoils and can sometimes even enhance the effect of the design (fig. 206). Nevertheless, it's important to exercise caution when selecting your lens. A good rule of thumb for choosing focal length

is: As short as necessary but as long as possible. Our aim is not to test the physical limits of our equipment, but rather to produce interestingly composed, well-lit images with a clear message. Extreme wide-angle effects are seldom beneficial to an image. Having said all that, there is, of course, nothing to be said against using ultra-wide-angle lenses to produce intentionally artistic effects (fig. 207).

It has often been observed that the higher a room and the less depth it has, the wider the angle of a lens should be to produce a balanced composition that reflects the proportions of the real, three-dimensional space. The opposite is also true: low, long spaces require longer lenses to produce harmonious-looking results without tunnel-like effects. Remember, you can exercise significant influence on the spatial effects in an image and prevent unwanted anomalies with careful use of different focal length lenses.



Fig. 206: Using a very short lens and a short subject distance produces a feeling of space that is greater than what really exists [focal length: 14mm]



Fig. 207: The vitality of this image is owed to the use of an ultra-wide-angle lens in combination with an unusual angle of view [14mm focal length]



Fig. 208: The image format here was chosen to accommodate the dominant feature of the image

3.11.4Image Formats

If you want your results to look authentic, the format you choose should

reflect the overall proportions of the space you are photographing (fig. 208). Generally, the opportunities to work against this rule are limited by the size and positions of the elements within the image. Sometimes it makes sense to switch from portrait to landscape or vice versa based on the furniture in the room (figs. 209 and 210). Experimental formats that don't reflect the orientation of the space you are working in usually produce sub-standard results. Portrait format shots of low, wide rooms are rarely satisfying and give too much emphasis to the less interesting ceiling and floor areas. Most interior shots are taken in landscape format.



Figs. 209, 210: Shooting from the exact same perspective but changing the image format can produce significantly different results. The landscape-oriented photo here emphasizes the expansiveness of the interior space and presents a neutral, realistic reproduction of the room. In contrast, the portrait-oriented photo highlights the desk and skylight, making these objects the dominant elements of the scene. The latter photo seems more like a product shot, and it doesn't convey much information about the dimensions of the room.

Especially under cramped conditions, ultra-wide-angle lenses and panorama techniques can be used to capture images of large spaces ([fig.](#)

211). If you are shooting indoor panoramas, remember that the relatively close proximity of the subject matter will increase the degree of potential optical shifts from source image to source image, making it essential to plan and execute your shoot very accurately.



Fig. 211: A shift panorama constructed from multiple source images [focal length: 2 x 24mm]

Histograms

A histogram is a graphical representation of the distribution of brightness levels within an image. The higher a peak, the more often the corresponding brightness value occurs within the frame. A broad histogram curve represents a high-contrast image, while a

narrow curve represents one with less overall contrast. Histogram functionality is designed to help photographers judge image exposure. It is an integral part of most image processing programs and is also built into most digital cameras. A histogram allows you to accurately judge the exposure of an image, even if your camera's monitor is quite small or the ambient light is too bright for you to properly see the monitor image. Some cameras even have live histogram functionality, which allows you to see the histogram that your selected exposure values will produce for the scene currently displayed on the monitor or in the viewfinder. An overexposed image will produce a histogram curve that is biased toward the right-hand end of the scale, while an image that is too dark will have more peaks toward the left. If the curve intersects with the ends of the scale, your image is likely to contain burned-out highlights or blocked-up shadows.

Some digital cameras include functionality that displays separate histogram curves for each RGB color channel, enabling you to analyze your images even more precisely.



3.11.5 Framing and Composition

The same rules that apply to producing interesting and effective exterior shots also apply to interior situations, although in this case, the photographer's room to maneuver is noticeably limited. Including elements of the surroundings or the sky is impossible, and composing a shot to include just one specific part of a room quickly reduces the magnitude of the photo to a scale at which the building is no longer recognizable as such (fig. 212). Here, individual architectural details or aspects of the interior

design take on the role of the main subject. However, these limitations also present opportunities for taking a more artistic approach to your photography (fig. 213) without having to resort to using two-dimensional or monotonous compositions. Skylights, staircases, and mirrors are great features for experimentation.

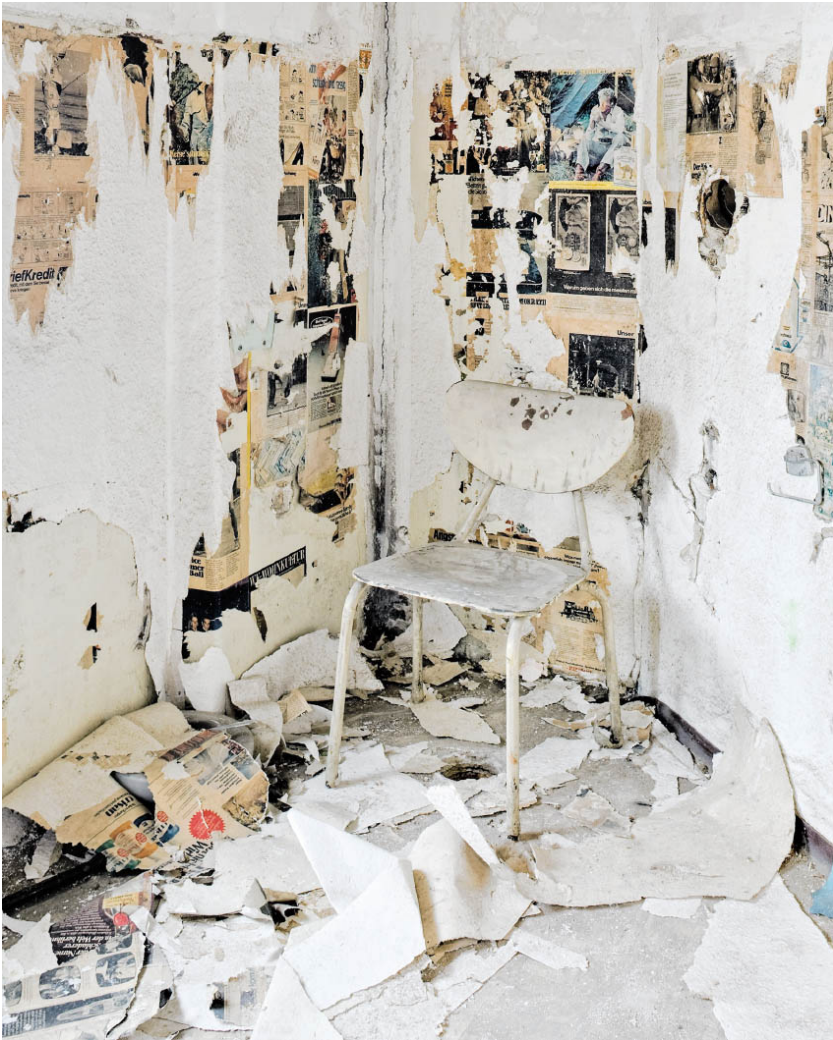


Fig. 212: A tight angle of view compels the viewer to pay attention to the details of a scene

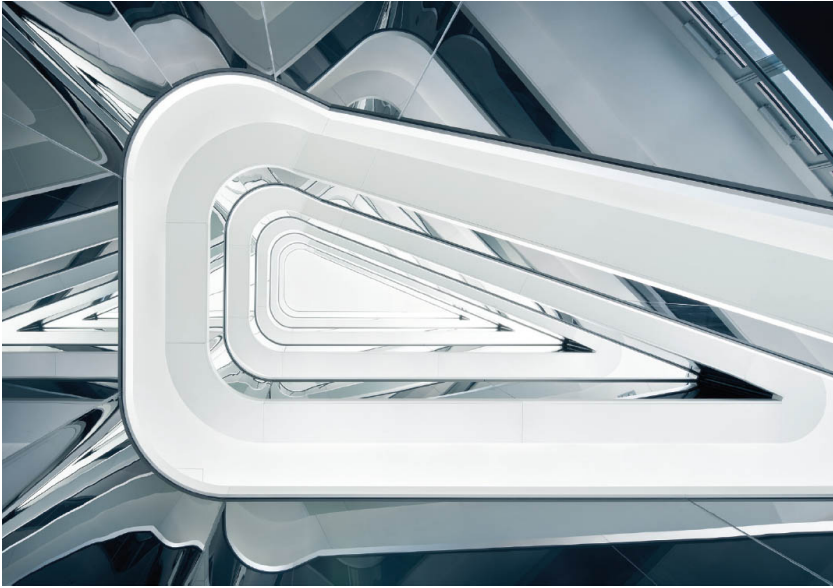


Fig. 213: An artistic image of a building interior relying on a vertical perspective pointed directly upward



Fig. 214: An interior shot composed according to the Golden Ratio

It is important to analyze each room individually and to look for ways

to accent its best features. The rule of thirds and the golden ratio ([fig. 214](#)) are both useful guidelines for producing well-proportioned images, while creative use of doorways, arches, and other gaps in the surrounding structure often helps to produce interesting and unusual photos. Portraying the transition from an interior to an exterior view also offers a whole range of new photographic possibilities ([fig. 215](#)).

In interior shots in which architecture is meant to be the center of attention, people are rarely included because they have the unwanted effect of dominating the scene. People also take the emphasis away from the structural side of the image and give it an overly personal touch. Because the size of the windows, doors, and other fittings are implicit within the space being photographed, human subjects are also rarely required to illustrate scale.

To liven up an interior architectural shot, however, you can integrate moving people. The motion blur of human figures brings life to an otherwise static scene ([fig. 216](#)). Because interior photos are generally shot with longer shutter speeds to begin with, you can generally dispense with an ND filter. Shutter speeds between 1/4 second (for quick movements across the camera) and 2 seconds (for leisurely movements toward or away from the camera) are suitable for this purpose. If a precise representation of the design is less important, you can even extend this method to use artistically blurred human subjects ([fig. 217](#)) or even their shadows to emphasize the feeling of space in an interior shot.



Fig. 215: An interior shot illustrating the transition from interior to exterior space

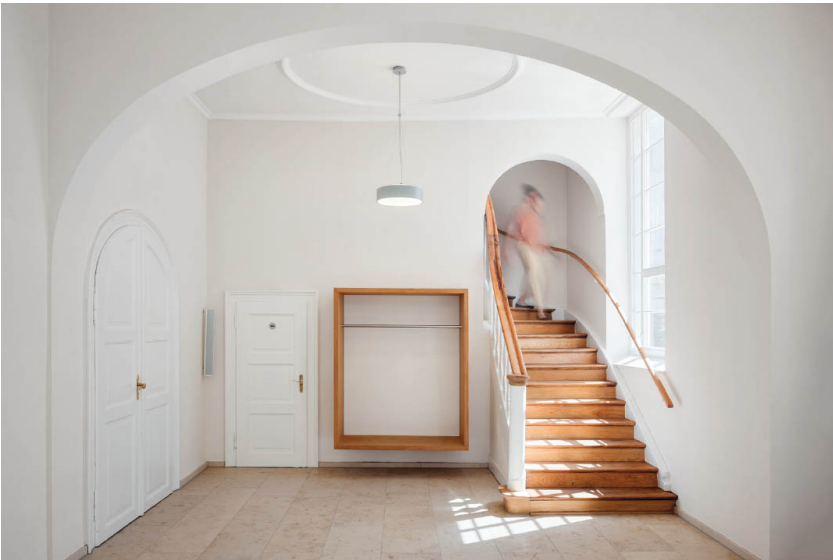


Fig. 216: Blurred human figures bring life to architectural scenes that are otherwise relatively static [0.5 sec. at f/9 and ISO 100]



Fig. 217: Using movement to add artistic flair to an interior shot [0.8 sec. at f/10 and ISO 100]

3.11.6 Camera Settings and Lighting

The ideal camera settings are generally the same for interior and exterior shots. Because it is usually darker inside a building than outside, a tripod is absolutely essential for preventing the camera shake that longer shutter speeds would cause. The differences in interior and exterior lighting are particularly obvious in and around windows, which often produce extreme ranges of contrast that neither digital nor analog cameras can capture in a single exposure. You can counteract the resulting overbright highlights or detail-free shadows in a number of ways.

The simplest approach is to simply accept that windows will appear extremely bright and detail-free and focus on producing a balanced exposure for the rest of a room ([fig. 218](#)). It is often the case that objects and elements outside the room are irrelevant or distracting anyway. All you have to do is take a matrix or center-weighted meter reading for an average bright area that contains no windows. Once you have either selected your exposure values (in manual mode) or saved the meter reading (refer to your camera's manual to identify the appropriate button), you can reframe the image to include the overbright areas and release the shutter. Always use

the histogram display to make sure you have captured the maximum possible range of tonal values—the histogram curve should reach but not intersect with the left-hand (shadow) end of the scale and should cross the right-hand (highlight) end at as low a level as possible. If your camera has exposure modes that extend the dynamic range in a way that also carries over to the RAW image data, you should activate them now.

Another way to balance interior and exterior lighting is to use wirelessly controlled flash units positioned to produce no obvious shadows while making sure they are themselves not visible within the frame. Ideally, the resulting effect will make it look as if the darker areas of the scene are lit by natural light. Unfortunately, the powerful, flexible flash units necessary to create this type of effect are beyond the budget of many hobbyist photographers. In place of these flash units, they can use one or more of the dedicated flash units sold by major camera manufacturers that have built-in infrared or radio-based control functionality. Some systems also allow your camera's built-in flash unit to be used as a “master” unit to control additional off-camera “slave” units.

The larger the room and the brighter the light entering the windows, the more difficult it is to produce adequate lighting using conventional flash equipment. One way to work around this type of problem is to deliberately underexpose to keep details beyond the windows visible and to light the rest of the frame by firing several indirect flashes in different directions while the shutter is open. If the shutter speed you are using makes it impossible to fire multiple flashes during the exposure, you can always use a sequence of images to produce the result you are looking for. Position your flash for each image so that it illuminates a different part of the scene without itself being visible in the frame, but try to avoid positioning it behind or to the side of the camera. One option is to use very powerful LED flashlights (>1600 lumens) with LED conversion filters (e.g., from LEE Filters) that provide continuous illumination, making the effects of the artificial lighting easier to judge. It is then relatively simple to use layers and masks during post-processing to merge a sequence of source photos into a single, well-exposed image. There is also specialized software available for performing light-balancing tasks, such as HDR ReLight by Oloneo, which allows you to control the impact of the light sources in your source images individually. This technique can also be used to photograph unlit rooms with no windows at all ([fig. 219](#)). And remember, it is virtually impossible to exactly reproduce the mood of the lighting built into a building's design if you use flash as a subsidiary light source.



Fig. 218: This image was exposed for the interior, which in turn causes the window areas to appear excessively bright as a result of the marked contrast



Fig. 219: A photo of a dark interior created by merging several source images illuminated using an off-camera flash



Fig. 220: An interior shot created using subtle DRI effects

Another effective way to produce interior shots with balanced lighting is to shoot a bracketed sequence and merge the resulting images using HDR or DRI software (or to do it manually with layers and masks). This ensures that the finished image contains detail across the entire frame and that deep shadows and bright highlights are not clipped ([fig. 220](#)). It is important not to overdo HDR and DRI effects, as they can quickly produce unrealistic-looking results. Don't attempt to darken your highlights so much that they could pass for midtones, as this only produces photos that look like paintings. Always aim to keep contrast realistic-looking while preserving visible detail in both highlight and shadow areas. A bracketing sequence should consist of at least three exposures or, in situations with an extreme range of contrast, five source images with exposure values ranging between a total of at least +2 and -2.

If you want to be able to adjust white balance after shooting, you will have to shoot using your camera's native RAW format. This is especially important in situations where the color temperatures of the interior (warm) and exterior (cold) light sources differ widely. If you use additional flash to brighten a room that has little or no artificial light, you can use special blue-colored filter gels (for example from LEE Filters) attached to the flash to adjust the temperature of the flash light to match the immediate environment. There are also filters available that warm flash light to match a dominant artificial light source if there is little or no exterior light. Bright

room lights strongly accentuate the differences between the color temperatures of artificial and incident natural light. Additional lighting challenges include multiple artificial light sources with different color temperatures such as LED, incandescent, halogen, and energy-saving bulbs; the simplest workaround here is simply to switch off any lamps whose color temperature differs widely from the dominant light source. Some photographers even attach colored gels to windows in order to match the outside light to the artificial indoor light, but this is a very complex and time-consuming approach. A simpler solution is to shoot after it gets dark (fig. 221) because then most light from outside will be artificial. But take care not to take your photos too early: The light is still extremely cold during the blue hour (section 3.12.5). Correcting the blue cast from outside lighting is possible in post-processing to a certain extent, where bluish areas are selected and then saturated with a warmer color tone. If you are using HDR or DRI techniques and your image contains a significant amount of natural light, you can use cooler white balance settings to “develop” the overexposed source images and warmer settings for the underexposed ones. This technique assumes that brighter image areas are lit by daylight and that darker areas are lit artificially. Yet another method is exposing your image twice: once with and once without artificial lighting. During post-processing, you can layer the two versions so that color values from the image without artificial light are used along with the brightness values from the version with artificial light. These are effective methods to attenuate strong differences in color temperature, even if they cannot eliminate them entirely.

There are no hard and fast rules governing the number and strength of lamps you can use to light a room. Bright overall lighting is better in some situations, while selective use of individual accents is better in others. If, for example, the sun is low in the sky and its light enters the room via a window, the best solution can be to do without artificial light altogether (fig. 222). If in doubt, the best solution is to give yourself a choice by taking multiple shots of a single scene using as many different lighting setups as possible.



Fig. 221: This photo was shot late enough in the day so that no natural light seeped in from the outside to mix with the room's artificial lighting



Fig. 222: An artistic interior shot created without the use of artificial light

3.12 External Factors That Influence a Shoot

These are the factors influencing a shoot that you can do little or nothing about. The photographer's approach to dealing with these factors is critical to the success of an architectural photo.

3.12.1 The Perfect Moment

Realizing an idea for a photograph demands a lot of a photographer: prep work for the shoot, a thoughtful perspective, the technical knowhow to program the best camera settings, and above all, the patience to wait for the right moment to take a picture.

Only after all of the movable elements that affect a photo's composition are in the right place is it time to release the shutter—for example cars, pedestrians, and clouds must all be out of the way or in their ideal positions with respect to the main subject. Weather can be even more of a critical factor. One can't always count on cloudless skies, which means that even with scattered clouds, your architectural subject will end up obscured in shadows from time to time during the day. Depending on how cloudy and windy it is, these windows of blocked sunlight may last for a while. In these situations, photographers have to exercise patience to wait for the sun to break through and for the reflections and shadows to take on the desired appearance for the shot.

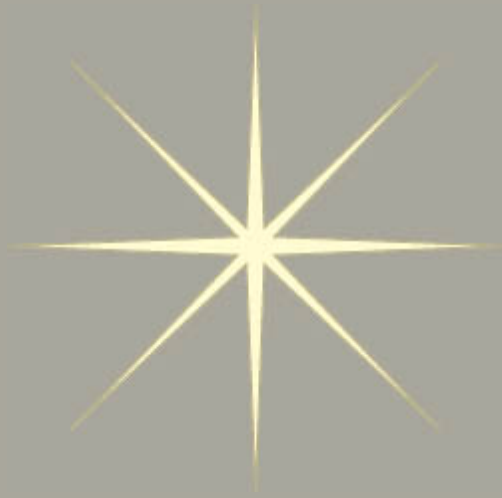
The window of time for the perfect moment of exposure can range from fractions of a second to several minutes. This fact alone makes working with a tripod essential, because it's not practical to stand around with the camera in your hand for indefinite periods. Working with a tripod has other advantages too: It's not uncommon that some elements of your scene will be in the right position while others are not. A tripod allows you to capture several iterations of the same scene with an identical frame, allowing you to selectively meld the best moments of various photos into one image during postprocessing.

Perceptiveness is of the utmost importance for photographers to be able to spot the ideal time to release the shutter. They have to observe and analyze the setting for their shot. Ideally, photographers should be aware of the environmental variables or lighting conditions that could positively or negatively influence a photo shoot well before the actual work of exposing images takes place. Some photographers prefer to work intuitively, relying

largely on spontaneous feelings; others lean on a wealth of experience related to specific shooting circumstances to sense exactly when the ideal moment is nearing (fig. 223). Sometimes this critical moment emerges quickly—don't ever let your guard down!—and other times it can be a long time coming. Perseverance is often rewarded with exceptional results.

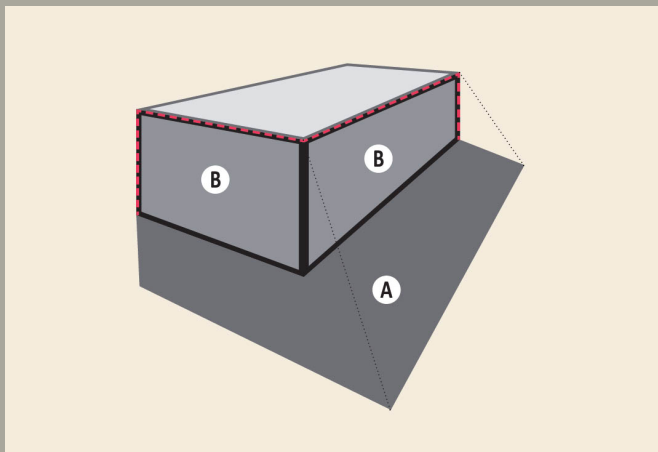


Fig. 223: Perfect timing: a cloud fleetingly passed through the upper right area of the image to provide some texture to the otherwise flat sky



The Effects of Shadows

In architectural photography, one often deals with various manifestations of shadows. They are usually caused by nearly parallel rays of light coming from the main light source present in almost all architectural photographs: the sun. A cast shadow is the shadow of an object (A) projected onto a surface or other objects. An object will also create its own shadow, which covers the surface facing away from the light source (B). This area is only lit indirectly by reflections coming from the surrounding area. It is interesting to note that the edge of the cast shadow is originated by the edge of the object's own shadow (represented by the dotted red line).



3.12.2 Shadows and Reflections

Shadows and reflections caused by the sun can have positive and negative effects on the look and feel of an architectural photo.

Shadows cast by other buildings or objects produce silhouettes on a building's façade, walls, roof, or the surrounding ground, while their nature is influenced by the position of the sun. A hard shadow that falls across the entire front of a building can spoil the aesthetics of the architecture and makes calculating the correct exposure values extremely difficult. However, this type of situation is relatively easy to work around using either a graduated filter or HDR/DRI imaging techniques. Shadows can also have positive effects on the appearance of a building, especially if it has an otherwise monotone or two-dimensional look. In this case, a shadow can form a compositional element of its own and add to the dynamics of the image (fig. 224). Protrusions and depressions in a building's façade often produce short, dark shadows that are an integral part of the look of the architecture. If the sun is low in the sky and positioned behind you, you run the risk of including your own shadow or that of your camera/tripod in the image. In such situations, the best solution is to alter your standpoint until your own shadow is covered by that of another building or object (fig. 225). Failing that, you will simply have to look for an alternative camera angle.



Fig. 224: The obvious shadows have been deliberately used to enliven this image



Fig. 225: Here, a carefully selected viewpoint prevented the photographer's own shadow from entering the frame

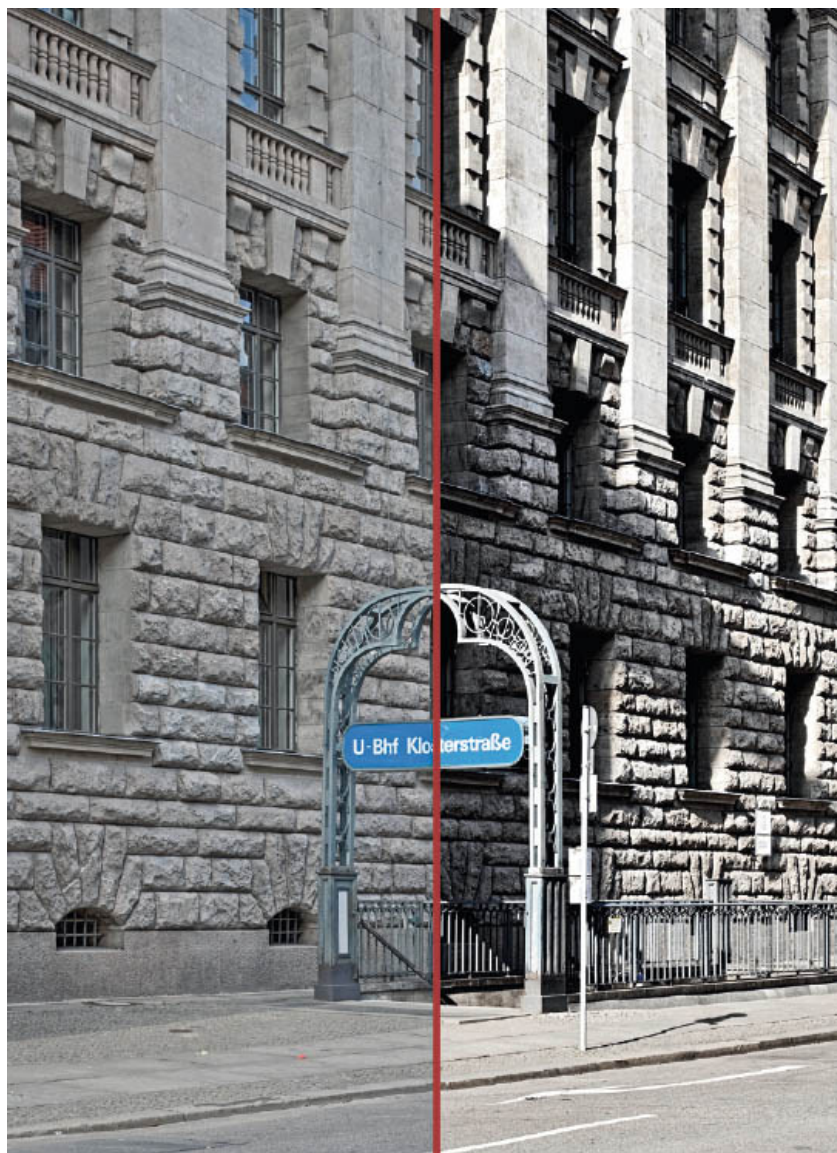


Fig. 226: A façade located in the building's own shadow (left) and directly lit (right)

Façades that fall within a building's own shadow exhibit much lower contrast than parts of the building that are directly lit, and appear dull and two-dimensional as a result. However, directly lit parts of a building often display less detail than shaded parts due to the effect of the very dark

shadows and extremely bright highlights they include (fig. 226).

Reflections can cause effects similar to shadows, with similarly positive (fig. 227) or negative results. They are more or less pronounced, depending on the material of the façade—for example, modern glass often reflects nearby buildings (fig. 228), thereby emphasizing the nature of the material. This type of effect can be so dominant that it actually overshadows the effect of the architecture itself.



Fig. 227: Reflections enhance the dynamic aesthetics of this image



Fig. 228: The nature of the material in the foreground produces an additional visual level reflected in the façade



Fig. 229: Direct sunlight produces tactile images with intense colors and strong shadows



Fig. 230: A cloudy sky gives the same scene a low-contrast look with soft shadows

3.12.3 The Effects of Weather

The weather is a factor we have no influence on but which can have a significant effect on the appearance of a building. Direct sunlight with few or no clouds produces dark shadows, bright reflections, high image contrast, intense colors, and a highly tactile overall look and feel. Such conditions can produce very aesthetic images and show the building in its best light, so to speak ([fig. 229](#)).

On the other hand, cloudy skies produce much lower contrast with soft shadows and a much more diffuse overall look. With an overcast sky, the light is scattered over a wide area, and the transitions between bright and dark areas are much softer ([fig. 230](#)). Reflections, too, are less intense. Cloudy situations give architecture a generally less vivid look—an effect that is not necessarily a disadvantage. In the northern hemisphere, north-facing façades are much easier to photograph under cloudy conditions, due to the reduced intensity of the backlight implicit in such situations ([fig. 231](#)).

Wait for the most neutral weather conditions possible if you are shooting for documentary purposes—i.e., try to shoot in typical local conditions. Unusual weather conditions, such as a beach hut surrounded by

snow, produce an unauthentic look. If you are shooting for artistic purposes, you can, of course, include as many contradictions in your image as you like, and dramatic weather is great for attracting a viewer's interest. The time during or just after a shower of rain is perfect for capturing otherwise nonexistent reflections ([fig. 232](#)). Snow and fog ([fig. 233](#)), too, are elements that can be used in the creation of surreal but interesting architectural photos.



Fig. 231: Clouds reduce the strength of the backlight and make it easier to expose this shot of a north-facing façade

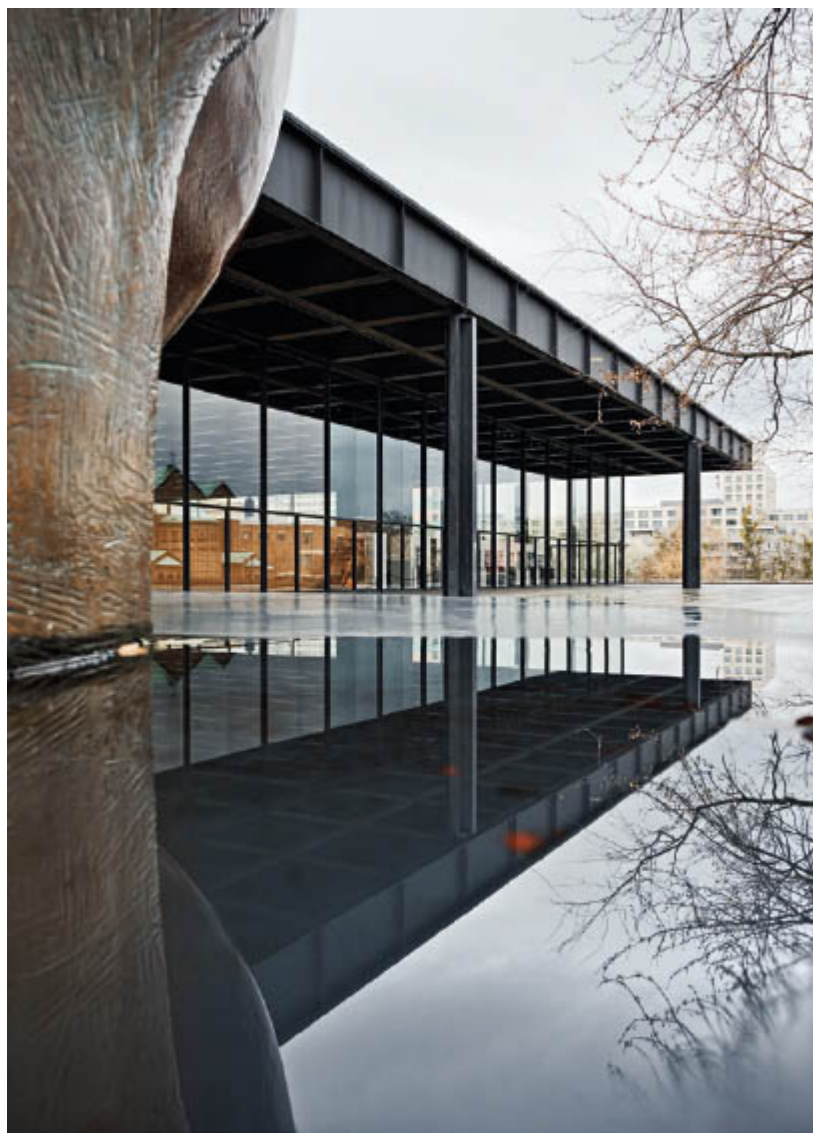


Fig. 232: A recent shower of rain provides an additional reflective element



Fig. 233: Fog tends to make architectural photographs feel surreal while simultaneously endowing them with an air of intrigue

3.12.4The Sky and Clouds

The sky makes up the background of the top portion of nearly every outdoor architectural photo and it has a significant influence on the overall effect of an image. Structures in the sky may have a subtle and restrained look or they may appear striking and chaotic, thus dramatically affecting

the appearance of a building either for the better or the worse.

Clouds are the primary structural element of the sky, and vapor trails from passing airplanes fall into this category too. In addition to these elements, however, are rays of sunlight visible because of atmospheric moisture (so-called crepuscular rays or “God’s rays”), birds and other flying objects, precipitation, rainbows, and even lightning, all of which can influence your photos. Viewers tend to find these visual elements out of the ordinary, so architectural photos featuring them usually take on a charged quality.

In contrast, clear blue skies don’t have nearly as much influence on photos of architecture. The large, uniform surface produces a highly neutral background for the subject, and the portion of the image area devoted to a cloudless sky does nothing to increase the sense of depth of a photograph. In some cases, though, a subtle gradation just above the horizon line resulting from atmospheric conditions endows photos with a certain sense of depth. Using ultra-wide-angle lenses with graduated filters is a productive way to bring some more plasticity to pictures featuring cloudless skies ([fig. 234](#)).



Fig. 234: A subtle gradation in this cloudless sky contributes to the photo’s sense of depth

The presence of clouds immediately makes architectural photographs

more dynamic, because their structural shapes invite the viewer's gaze into the image. That doesn't mean clouds are always an improvement: if the right cloud finds itself in the right position in your photo, the upside for the architectural subject can be tremendous (fig. 235); on the other hand, clouds can become a dominant feature that detracts from your intended subject. Reflections from glass facades and windows can also be positively and negatively influenced by the presence of clouds. In some cases, a gentle cirrostratus cloud can pleasantly accent a large surface of glass, and in others, a billowing heap cloud may mar an otherwise pristinely uniform reflective building front.

It's also important to consider the representation of clouds in certain special photographic situations. For example, if you're working with a strong ND filter (section 3.10) during the day to allow for the use of slow shutter speeds (>5 seconds), then you can effectively capture cloud movements in your images. This effect produces dynamic images with cloud structures blurred in the direction of the wind—an appearance that contrasts markedly with our natural perception of the scene. When this blurry cloud movement is captured as the background of an architectural photo shot from an upward perspective, the results are often fascinating and abstract. Shooting during the beginning of the blue hour (section 3.12.5) can also dramatically benefit architectural photographs featuring high cirrus or cirrocumulus clouds. These clouds function as projection surfaces for the last rays of a sun that has already sunk below the horizon and is no longer visible from the camera's perspective, producing a dramatic play of color (fig. 236).



Fig. 235: Fine cloud structures very high up in the atmosphere enliven this image and provide the scene with spatial depth



Fig. 236: The gentle, pastel colors of this calm evening sky contrast effectively with the geometric façade of this building



Fig. 237: Cirrus (left of the image center), cirrostratus (right of the image center), and cirrocumulus clouds (smaller spotted area, far right), as well as manmade vapor trails (left)



Fig. 238: Expansive altostratus clouds produce a relatively diffuse light



Fig. 239: Altocumulus clouds establish the background for this architectural photo

Below, you'll find an overview of the different types of clouds that can form in the sky and their relative effects on architectural photography:

Cirrus: Cirrus clouds are high-level formations that generally improve architectural photographs through their wispy, thread-like appearance that enlivens the background and creates a feeling of lightness in the composition. High-altitude winds tend to cause cirrus clouds to appear frayed or unraveled, making these bright white figures have a relatively thin but nonetheless powerful shape capable of making the sky glimmer in certain areas. Sheet-like cirrostratus clouds and cirrocumulus clouds (sometimes called herringbone clouds) take on different shapes from their cirrus counterparts, but they also belong to the same class of high-level clouds and generally produce positive results in architectural pictures ([fig. 237](#)).

Vapor Trails: These artificial cloud formations, also known as contrails, are composed of ice crystals resulting from aircraft exhaust. Despite their manmade origins, they fall into the same category as cirrus clouds, because they form at a similar altitude ($> 8\text{km}$) and they have a similar appearance. Contrails can pose some problems for photographers if they appear in otherwise cloudless skies because they usually form in a straight line; and this geometric quality tends to command the viewer's attention, detracting from the photo's main subject. But conversely, they can also produce

positive effects when such lines or crosses artfully break up an otherwise uniform sky.

Altostratus: These specimens are middle-altitude clouds and they generally lack a definite shape, instead forming a broad layer with a gray-blue color ([fig. 238](#)). The sun usually still penetrates altostratus clouds, but it takes on the appearance of a vague area of brightness. When these clouds scatter sunlight, the result is a soft, diffuse light that produces subtle shadows, if any at all. While photos shot in these conditions often take on a pleasant atmospheric look and feel, others tend to come off as somewhat bland. Other weather conditions are often better suited for depicting a building in its best light.

Alto cumulus: The middle-altitude area is also home to altocumulus clouds, but these formations differ from their altostratus counterparts in that they have a torn, frayed, and relatively fine texture ([fig. 239](#)). It's easy to mistake them as cirrocumulus and stratocumulus clouds, but if you extend your arm and measure their thickness with your fingers, altocumulus clouds are generally between one and three fingers wide. Depending on their appearance and thickness, these clouds can have positive or negative influence on architectural images, because they have a more dominant presence than clouds that form at higher altitudes.

Cumulus: Classic cumulus clouds are heaping formations that occur at low altitudes. They're often described as puffy or cotton-like, featuring a flat underside and a billowy top. Cumulus clouds often form defined shapes with a significant thickness, which makes them very dominant features in architectural photographs. Unlike plain blue skies, these clouds can overwhelm the architectural subject visually, appear to grow out of the building at hand, or visually detract from key details in a building ([fig. 240](#)). Furthermore, they're capable of blocking the sun from your photographic subjects for extended periods of time depending on the number of clouds in the sky and the speed of the wind, which may result in long periods of waiting while shooting, especially if your composition depends on direct sunlight.



Fig. 240: A cumulus cloud dominates the subject here, because it appears to grow out of the building, compromising the emphasis on the architectural details

Stratocumulus: Clouds in this class form at low altitudes. Their undersides tend to blur together and their tops are flatter and less discrete than cumulus clouds. Stratocumulus clouds often make for subtle but powerful accents in architectural photos.



Fig. 241: The Flatiron building beneath a thick cover of clouds. The local contrast in the sky area was boosted to accentuate the narrow subject.



Fig. 242: Nimbostratus clouds support the dramatic feel of this photo, which was exposed just before rain started to fall

Stratus: Stratus clouds are the third type to form at low altitudes. Similar to altostratus clouds, they generally form in layers rather than distinct

shapes, and they can practically reach down to the earth's surface (high fog). They are not generally useful for architectural photos on account of their expansive surface area and tendency to block out sunlight. In fact, they are often accompanied by a light drizzle. That's not to say that they can't at times play a decisive role in effective architectural photos (fig. 241). Photographers do well to watch the cloud cover closely when stratus clouds are about because they frequently burn off as the day goes on.

Finally, there are also **nimbostratus** and **cumulonimbus** clouds. But these formations often mean rain (fig. 242) or thunderstorms, and such weather conditions are beneficial to architectural photographers only on the rarest of occasions.



Fig. 243: A dramatically backlit scene owing to the time of day [1/100 sec. at f/16 and ISO 80]



Fig. 244: A building illuminated by the special light of the blue hour [8 sec. at f/10 and ISO 100]

3.12.5 Choosing the Right Time of Day

The time of day is the factor a photographer can influence most (fig. 243). Under cloudy skies, the differences between morning and afternoon light are negligible, whereas bright sunlight can produce a wide variety of lighting situations through the course of a day—façades that are in the shade in the morning can be directly lit at midday. The time of day also influences the shape and intensity of shadows cast by other objects, and some buildings are only lit by sunlight for a short phase of each day. It is always a good idea to research your planned location in advance of a shoot using maps or online satellite images. Apps for smartphones and tablets such as The Photographer’s Ephemeris are also excellent tools for preparing to shoot in a specific location. These apps can give you critical information about the sun’s path, including the specific sunrise and sunset times for any location in the world. Other information about sun height, shadow length, start and end times for the blue hour, and many other details are also available.

An especially interesting time for architectural photographers is the so-called “blue hour” that occurs just after sunset when the sky is still indirectly lit by the sun and artificial light begins to have an effect on a

scene (fig. 244). Photos shot at this time of day are well known for the color of the sky and their intense overall mood. In contrast to night shots, the unlit areas of blue hour photos are still indirectly brightened (figs. 245). The same effect—caused by the stray light emanating from the invisible sun—also occurs in the early morning hours.

During and after nightfall, the lighting emphasis in most architectural scenes is reversed, and a building's interior, which is difficult to see in daytime, becomes the glowing central subject at night. Windows, which are often the darkest and most reflective elements of a façade during the day, become blazing transparent surfaces at night (fig. 246). In contrast, darker parts of a building often appear formless in the dark. Using HDR or DRI techniques is a great way to produce balanced contrast in night shots. The pronounced contrast between light and dark areas makes exposure bracketing extremely practical for night photography where the merged exposures exhibit a balanced distribution of brightness with no one area too overexposed.



Fig. 245: This building was shot right before the end of the blue hour: the illuminated areas stand out dramatically while the unlit areas fade into the background [10 sec. at f/9 and ISO 100]



Fig. 246: A classic night shot with an impressively glowing subject [20 sec. at f/6.7 and ISO 100]



Fig. 247: The seasonal coloring of the surrounding vegetation is an important factor in the overall look of an image

3.12.6The Effects of the Seasons

The season is the external factor that you will least be able to influence, and the appearance of the vegetation surrounding a building will change significantly in the course of the year. Leafy trees can block the view of a building in summer, but present no problem in winter. Autumnal colors give an image a completely different look than springtime green ([fig. 247](#)). These types of impressions have an immediate and obvious effect on the look and feel of an architectural photo. Cool blue tones will always produce different feelings in a viewer than warmer yellow or red tones.



Fig. 248: Shot in late summer at midday, the sun is high in the sky and gives this image strong colors and contrast



Fig. 249: The same scene shot in winter, again at midday. The overall look is cooler, and the low sun provides diffuse light.

The sun's path changes with the seasons, too. The light from a low winter sun has farther to travel through the Earth's atmosphere, making it more

diffuse than summer sunlight. Winter sunlight also produces long shadows and is often the cause of backlit situations, making a balanced exposure more difficult to achieve. The summer sun is high in the sky and casts short shadows that give buildings a more immediate, accented look (figs. 248 and 249).



Fig. 250: Tight framing adds emphasis to the shapes and structures within the building [focal length: 70mm]



Fig. 251: Using multiple visual layers produces an abstract effect [focal length: 88mm]

3.13 Creative Tips and Tricks

The following sections offer detailed tips and tricks for taking creative architectural photos.

3.13.1 Extreme Framing

Clever composition combined with tight framing accentuates detail and gives a building a completely new, stylized look (fig. 250). An extension of the same idea involves layering multiple details to form complex, almost completely abstract images that can be quite difficult to interpret (fig. 251). Tight crops that contain no guides as to scale can also appear quite abstract (fig. 252). You can use techniques like these to alter the appearance of a building so as to make it unrecognizable. The textures and patterns within its design become a part of a graphical whole, while the actual architecture takes on a background role (fig. 253).

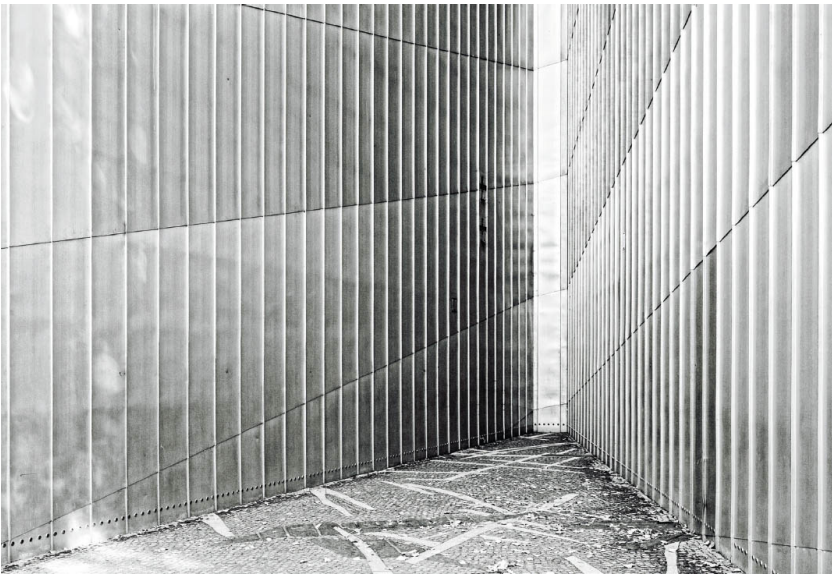


Fig. 252: A lack of reference objects makes it impossible to judge the scale of the subject

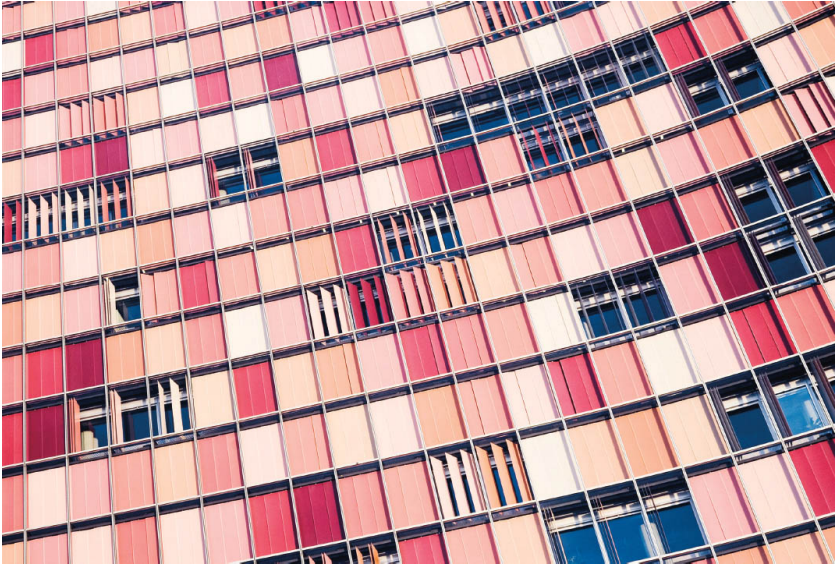


Fig. 253: Extreme framing brings shapes, patterns, and colors to the forefront in this image [focal length: 40mm]



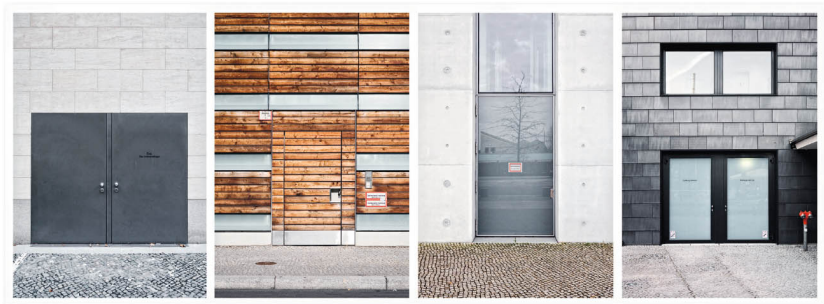
Fig. 254: The unusual camera position looking straight upward gives this image an interesting but unfamiliar look [focal length: 14mm]



Fig. 255: Large areas of sky set the stage for the receding skyscrapers in this overhead shot [focal length: 14mm]

3.13.2 Shooting Upwards

Human beings generally perceive their surroundings on a horizontal plane by looking forward, and we rarely allow the horizon to leave our field of view. Looking upward produces an unusual, unfamiliar view of a building that lacks context and confuses our perception of spatial relations ([fig. 254](#)). This type of view, especially in interior situations, can convince the viewer that a wall is a ceiling or vice versa. The sky suddenly becomes a large, uniform background that is perfect for setting off the features of the subject. A vertical view also allows you to rotate the frame in any direction without breaking any fundamental rules of composition ([fig. 255](#)).



Figs. 256, 257: Two image sequences: Combining multiple images that have a common theme gives individual photos a new and interesting context

3.13.3Image Sequences

Another way to photograph buildings creatively is to shoot a sequence that gives multiple images a mutual context. My example shows a sequence with a “doors” theme (figs. 256 and 257). As long as the theme is clearly recognizable, materials, colors, lighting, and exposure can vary widely from image to image. Selecting the right images to display together is an integral part of shooting a successful sequence—one of the more artistic approaches to architectural photography.

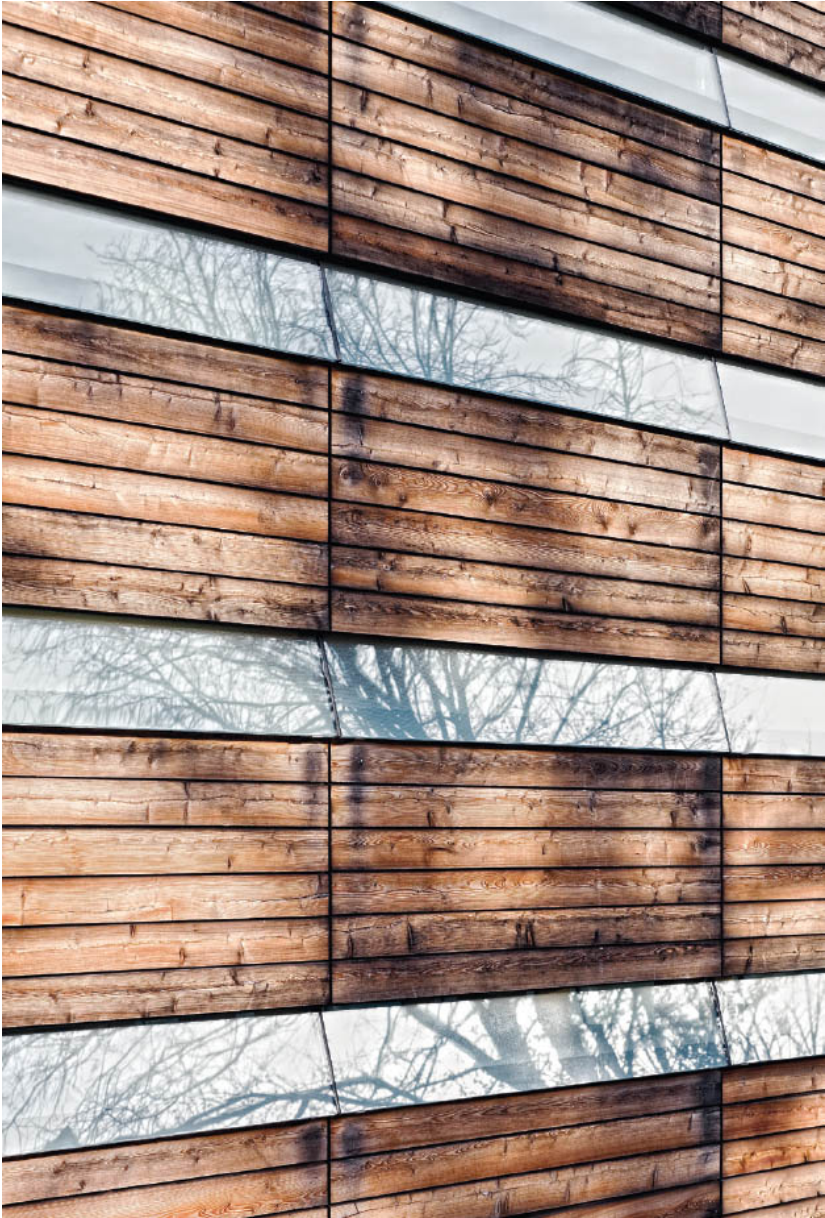


Fig. 258: An example of implicit symbolism through reflection: here, wood is simultaneously reflected in its original form and used in processed form as a building material



Fig. 259: Ambiguous spatial relations produced by strong reflections

3.13.4Extreme Use of Reflections

Reflections are particularly effective if they produce a second, separate visual layer within an image. Again, clever composition in combination with reflective materials can produce images with a deeper message or a symbolic feel—for example, by combining elements of old and new, light and heavy, or transparent and opaque (fig. 258).

Reflections can be so abstract that the viewer no longer comprehends what he/she is seeing. Extreme compositions created using layering or sequential techniques can be used to create crazy mixtures of shapes, textures, and details. In such cases, the architecture itself becomes a mere background on which you can project your own personal message (fig. 259).



Fig. 260: Creating a particular look using deliberate underexposure . . .



Fig. 261: . . . or using deliberate overexposure

3.13.5 Selective Over- and Underexposure

Using selective under- or overexposure is another way to give your architectural photos a unique creative edge. Deliberate **underexposure** emphasizes brighter details within the frame while further darkening midtones and shadows, creating a surreal, bleak look (fig. 260). Selective **overexposure** has the opposite effect. All zones that contain brightness above a certain level are reproduced in white and give an image a frameless, floating look (fig. 261). The emphasis on form and texture makes this type of photo less authentic and more artistic. This is why under- and overexposed images often remind the viewer of computer-generated or graphic illustrations.

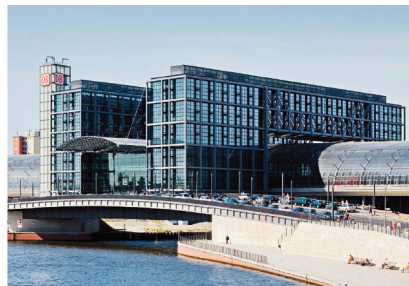
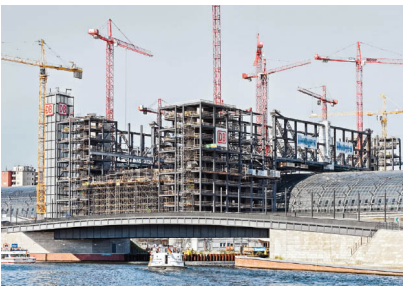
3.13.6 “Before and After” Views

Comparing views of a building at different times is an effective way to illustrate the passage of time. In an architectural context, this technique can

be used to show a building from the same viewpoint but at different times of year, or at various stages in the course of its construction (fig. 262 and 263). Other examples are views of a building before and after renovation or a change of owner (fig. 264 and 265).

3.13.7Fake Miniatures

The tilt function of a tilt/shift lens can be used to create so-called “fake miniatures.” This technique involves tilting the plane of focus so that just a very small portion of the potential depth of the image remains in sharp focus while all other details recede into blur (fig. 266). The resulting shallow depth of field (normally associated with close-up photography) makes photos of life-size subjects look like miniature scale models. Optically, this effect can only be produced using tiltable lenses, with longer lenses producing a stronger effect than shorter ones. Even at wide apertures, regular lenses produce too much depth of field to create this type of effect.



Figs. 262, 263: “Before and After” views of a subject are real eyecatchers



Figs. 264, 265: Side-by-side comparison of a room interior before and after remodeling

Fake miniature effects are most effective in shots taken from a raised viewpoint, such as a bridge or a tower. The more individual objects in the scene and the greater the subject distance, the more striking the effect will be. Objects that are too close to the camera tend to spoil the overall effect. Fake miniature effects can also be produced digitally (section 4.6.4).



Fig. 266: Using a tilt/shift lens to create a fake miniature effect

3.14 Solutions to Common Problems

Shooting HDR source images without a tripod: Merging a bracketing sequence into an HDR/DRI image is an effective way to capture high-contrast subjects that exceed your camera's normal dynamic range. It is still possible to shoot usable sequences of source images, even if you don't happen to have a tripod with you.

HDR and DRI source images have to be framed identically to be effective. If you try to merge images that are framed slightly differently, some details will not overlap correctly and the merged image will be spoiled. The closer your subject, the more obvious slight differences in perspective become, so it is essential to keep camera movements between shots to a minimum if you are shooting without a tripod. Combined with bracketing functionality, continuous shooting mode allows you to shoot a sequence of differently exposed images handheld in a very short space of time and with only minimal shifts of camera position. Make sure that the longest exposure of your sequence isn't so long that it includes visible camera shake. But remember, you will still have to align your source images digitally, making handheld bracketing sequences at best a makeshift solution that only works if the scene you want to capture is brightly lit.

Shooting shake-free photos without using a remote release: If you are shooting in low light using a tripod, it is always preferable to use a remote shutter release to prevent camera shake. If you don't have a remote release on hand, your camera's self-timer can help you avoid camera shake caused by human contact with the camera. Using the camera's mirror lock-up feature improves the situation further by ensuring that the movements of the mirror aren't transmitted to the camera body while the shutter is open.

The self-timer's built-in delay means that you cannot precisely determine the moment at which the shutter is released, so if you cannot live with this limitation you will have to release the shutter by hand. This is not usually a problem in daylight, but the longer shutter speeds required in low light make things more difficult. You can reduce vibration if you support the hand pressing the shutter button with your other hand, and the heavier your tripod, the less of a problem camera shake will be.

Preventing blurred images and camera shake: Bad weather and low light quickly extend shutter speeds to a point at which you can no longer shoot handheld. A simple formula— $1 / (\text{Focal Length} \times \text{Crop Factor})$ —provides you with the shortest usable shutter speed for most situations. For example, a camera with a Four Thirds sensor (crop factor 2) and a 200mm lens requires the use of a minimum shutter speed of $1 / (200 \times 2) = 1/400$ second. This rule was originally formulated in the analog age to cater to small-scale prints. If you are using a camera with a particularly high-resolution sensor, or if you want to make very large prints, camera shake may become visible sooner. If you are in any doubt, always select a shorter shutter speed. Many contemporary DSLRs and lenses are equipped with built-in image stabilizing functionality, although these systems, too, have physical limits beyond which they are not completely reliable.



Fig. 267: A handheld night shot taken using a high ISO value [focal length: 24mm, 1/25 sec. at f/4, and ISO 3200]

When using a modern DSLR in low light, you can increase the ISO value, but remember that higher ISO values nearly always increase the amount of visible noise and reduce the available dynamic range in your images.

Opening the lens to a medium aperture value will help to reduce the risk of camera shake, but it is generally inadvisable to shoot architectural photos with the maximum aperture, especially if you are not using a high-end lens. Wide apertures produce more visible lens errors, so use your maximum aperture only if you have already exhausted your other options, such as increasing your ISO value as far as the visible image noise is acceptable for you. A correctly exposed image using a high ISO value ([fig. 267](#)) nearly always looks better than one with edge blur, chromatic aberrations, vignettes, or too little depth of field.

One of the simplest ways to prevent camera shake is to use found objects such as walls, balustrades, ledges, tables, chairs, or even parked cars as a kind of emergency tripod. Use a soft cloth or bag to prevent your chosen surface from scratching your camera, or vice versa. A beanbag made of cloth or leather also provides a soft, flexible support for your camera that allows for slight camera adjustments, and absorbs vibrations. If there is no horizontal surface at hand, you can even use the walls of a building to support your camera (and a fingertip to support the lens) while

taking portrait format shots.

A real old-school method of preventing camera shake involves tying a non-elastic string between the camera body and one of your feet. Shorten the string to a length at which it is taut when you are holding your camera in its normal shooting position. This is a simple but effective way to reduce the camera shake caused by minimal hand tremble.

If none of the above options apply to your situation, you will simply have to rely on the steadiness of your hand. Leaning against walls is a useful way to keep your body steady when you are shooting handheld. Breathe steadily and try to release the shutter between breaths. In critical situations, taking multiple shots of a subject increases your chances of producing at least one shake-free image.

Comments by Marcus Bredt

On architectural photography in general

At first glance, architecture appears to be an easy subject—buildings don't move, don't need to be given instructions, and are available at all hours of the day and night (fig. 268). The tricky part of the job is endowing an inanimate object with life. Architectural photography is not about simple documentation. It comprises much more than merely capturing buildings and structures photographically. Photographers have to get to know their subjects well enough to make familiar objects appear extraordinary. We walk past countless unobtrusive office buildings every day. We usually use railway stations for their intended purpose without giving them a second glance. We do not generally consider factories and warehouses to be works of art. Our job is to make normally ignored objects interesting. To succeed in this task, architectural photographers can accentuate geometric form to the point at which its intrinsic aesthetic grace suddenly becomes apparent or they can capture tiny details of a subject's surroundings in a way that tells a story or portrays the charm of an otherwise plain-looking building (fig. 269). But remember, a great architectural photo has nothing to do with clever effects or disguising the subject's true nature.

On taking your first steps as an architectural photographer

It is, of course, a lot of fun to try out new effects, especially when you are starting out. Experimentation with technical tricks and clever techniques is the only way to find your own style. But the subject itself is always more important, and a great building often guarantees a great photo. In this respect, our first assignments for Daniel Libeskind were a real blessing. His spectacular architecture cries out to be photographed under a multitude of lighting conditions and from a variety of adventurous viewpoints. I still like the images that we produced back then, even if we have progressed a great deal since. It takes a long time to develop your own personal style, and while good technique helps, style still has a lot to do with gut feelings and

intuition.



Fig. 268: Oriental Sports Center, Shanghai; photo: Marcus Bredt



Fig. 269: Warehouse, Osnabrück; photo: Marcus Bredt

On architectural photography as a profession

In earlier years, I would have said that the subject forms the image, but today I would say that I'm the one who forms the subject. In a sense, I create the building again from scratch through my photography methods so that I establish how the viewer perceives the subject. This ability to creatively explore a design is a favorite aspect of my work. The perspective, the lighting conditions (either coincidental or deliberate), the inclusion or exclusion of surrounding elements, the possibilities of post-processing—these are the variables under my control. My clients have the final say over which images to use, of course, but I have the creative flexibility to bring less conventional shots to the table ([fig. 270](#)).

Architectural photography is anything but simply taking snapshots of a building. Only once technical questions are no longer an issue can you start to perceive a building as a congruent whole. You need to have the chance to enter into a dialog with the building, and once you do, the building will no longer be simply an object standing in front of you. My own depictions of architectural structures emerge only when I start to work with my subject. This task involves including the weather, the surroundings, and the building's intended function and life as a whole in my overall view. It is very important to me to show that we not only live within our environment, but also with it. Just the same way as we affect urban planning, natural processes, and the people we meet, these things affect us too in equal measures.

My photography has changed over the past several years, because I myself have changed. My earlier work still pleases me, but I would approach the same buildings differently now, and the same buildings would affect me in different ways. As I work, I constantly observe the perpetual communication between people and materials, technology and nature, stasis and flux, perception and experience, and I attempt to unite and capture these tensions with a click of a button ([fig. 271](#)). Living in that moment when I anchor both myself and everything else in my shot is the real payoff for my work.

Travel

Travel is an integral part of my job and it continues to be particularly enjoyable whether I find myself in Europe, the United States, China, or South America. I'm always on the road and I inevitably carry with me

many impressions about the various cultures and societies I have visted. The architects whom I work for are primarily from Germany, but they build structures around the world: Africa, Azerbaijan, Brazil, China, Poland, and Vietnam. The locations where I work are incredibly varied, as are the conditions under which I must work at each of these sites. The design may be drafted by a German hand, but the structures are erected on site in foreign locales, a fact that requires me to get to know my shooting location before starting my work in earnest.



Fig. 270: Estádio Nacional de Brasília; photo: Marcus Bredt



Fig. 271: Maritim Museum, Lingang; photo: Marcus Bredt

Every location has its own specific circumstances, which is why I don't have a defined process that I always follow. There are, nonetheless, a few general rules I tend to follow. For example, I usually start by observing my subject from a distance and I try to take in as many different perspectives as possible ([fig. 272](#)). I try to get to know the surrounding area a bit, so I can develop a sense of my subject's situation within a broader context. That may sound a bit pompous, but my goal is to have some spontaneous interaction with the area and I frequently end up discovering a unique setting for a shot ([fig. 273](#)). What's most important is to have your camera on hand at all times, because a great photo opportunity rarely presents itself twice.

After these initial steps, my process depends on whether I'm working alone or with others, and whether I need to adhere to a specific schedule or I have the opportunity to return at different times of the day or to wait for weather and lighting conditions to change. Some countries present a fairly rigid framework that I have to work within, while in others agreements can change from one minute to the next. Flexibility is therefore always a virtue, which suits my style perfectly. I'm not someone who depends on structure and am much happier to react to circumstance and the everyday surprises that life always has in store for us ([fig. 274](#)).



Fig. 272: The Denver Art Museum; photo: Marcus Bredt



Fig. 273: Hanoi; photo: Marcus Bredt



Fig. 274: Hanoi; photo: Marcus Bredt

From analog to digital

The art of photography fundamentally changed for me when digital equipment overtook film. I tried to hold out for a while with my film camera, but eventually I came to the conclusion that my client's needs, as well as my own priorities, had changed. My analog camera was significantly heavier, and crawling under the dark cloth was simply behind the times even if it was a quaint exercise. In the days of film, 20 exposures was a lot for one day, and those had to do the job. And the crazy thing was that they usually did do the job. There was hardly any opportunity to alter the images after they were exposed. Today, it's unimaginable not to make use of the possibilities of digital post-processing. I generally eschew producing images that are obviously altered, but a modest touch-up here or there is always welcome.

The biggest change that accompanied the digital revolution was the time costs at the various steps of the process. The work required after the actual shooting is complete has dramatically increased. In the old days, you handed your film over to a developing lab, received the final images, and then were left to choose the standouts. Today, I inspect the results while I'm shooting, drive to my office, and then make the first pass of selections from at least 100 pictures. And after I make the final selection of images,

the actual post-processing begins. The whole process consumes an immense amount of time. Being constantly confronted with the images is a dramatic change from being forced to spend some time apart from them. In fact, it's often important to distance yourself from your work, or to solicit a second opinion from other photographers and completely independent parties, to win some perspective.

I usually know when a picture is a good one as soon as I make the exposure, but the upside of shooting digitally is that I can inspect the image on site to confirm whether my impression is accurate. With analog photography, excitement built as I waited for my images to be developed and then reached a peak when I finally got to inspect the results. Nowadays, these treasured moments occur while I'm shooting.

Stadium Photography

Stadiums are highly complex buildings. Any photograph of a stadium is not complete unless it captures the special social significance that the structure represents ([fig. 275](#)). When confronted with an exterior shot of a stadium, viewers must be able to connect the image with the events that transpire within the stadium's walls, and similarly interior shots have to inspire thoughts about the goings-on beyond the walls. The challenges of photographing stadiums become even more clear when you consider that classic architectural photography usually works best when people are completely or mostly absent from the scene. But stadiums are buildings for the masses, in which events of near-religious significance take place. Pictures of empty stadiums therefore have a heroic effect on viewers, producing deference to the site of competition ([fig. 276](#)).



Fig. 275: Estádio Nacional de Brasília; photo: Marcus Bredt

Photographing a stadium requires that I produce a single image that portrays the building's physical structures and functions as well as its social importance. The task is both photographically and personally challenging. Standing on the pristine grass where the best athletes in the world will soon

be battling for glory and looking up at the empty bleachers is an overwhelming opportunity. The architecture of a stadium can really draw you in, so you have to be careful that your image captures not only your feeling of being overwhelmed, but the entire complexity of the scene before you..

It's always interesting to see how stadiums interact with their surroundings (fig. 277). Or how they might change the face of a previously undeveloped area. Stadiums situated directly within a city are particularly impressive, because they are obviously integrated with the lives of the people who live near them (fig. 278). This scenario is becoming less common, because new stadiums tend to be built on the outskirts of town or in outlying areas for reasons related to functional infrastructure. The wide-open spaces surrounding these buildings are attractive and often allow for engaging photography.

Vita

Marcus Bredt was born in 1968 in Göttingen, Germany, and has lived and worked as a photographer in Berlin since 1992. After finishing his professional training at Lette-Verein in Berlin, he co-founded the BitterBredt photo agency. Since 2001, he has worked on his own as Bredt-Fotografie shooting projects worldwide for renowned architects, businesses, and magazines.



Fig. 276: National Stadium Warsaw; photo: Marcus Bredt



Abb. 277: Arena da Amazônia, Manaus; photo: Marcus Bredt



Fig. 278: Olympic Stadium Kiev; photo: Marcus Bredt



4Image Processing

This chapter deals with the computer-based processing steps that you can apply to your images after shooting. Before you can begin processing digital images, you have to load them onto your computer using either the connection cable provided with your camera or a memory card reader

attached directly to the computer. Digital images can be stored and processed in the form of preprocessed JPEG or TIFF files or as RAW files, which are the digital equivalent to analog negatives, and which provide you with the maximum possible amount of usable image data. RAW files can also be processed a limitless number of times without actually altering or degrading the original image data. If you are shooting analog originals, these will first have to be digitized using a scanner before you can process them. High-end digitizers produce much better quality scans than hobby-grade flatbed or film scanners. Once you have scanned them, you can process, optimize, and present your analog images in just as many ways as you can your digital originals.

4.1 Digital Image Formats

4.1.1 What Is RAW?

RAW image formats are proprietary not only to each camera manufacturer, but also to individual camera models. RAW image data is saved in its purest possible form with virtually no intervention from the camera's firmware. A piece of software called a RAW converter is required to perform subsequent processing and conversion to universally readable formats.

4.1.2 The Differences Between JPEG and RAW

In contrast to the popular JPEG format, RAW image data is saved to the camera's memory card losslessly and at full color depth. Image parameters such as white balance, color saturation, contrast, noise reduction, and sharpening are saved separately from the actual image data and can therefore be altered later without reducing the quality of the original image. The only parameters that are "set in stone" are the shutter speed, aperture, and ISO value used when the image was shot.

When JPEG format is used, the data file is processed within the camera immediately after the shot and before storage. While Bayer interpolation replaces missing color values with information from neighboring pixels ([page 17](#)), the subsequent in-camera workflow includes image optimization steps like adjustment of internal sharpness and contrast, color depth

reduction, and data compression (figure 279). Changing these parameters later is possible with additional steps in an image-processing program, but keep in mind that since the data is no longer original, there will be some loss of quality.

4.1.3The Advantages of Shooting in RAW Format

The advantages of shooting RAW images begin right away during shooting, as you have don't have to pay detailed attention to as many shooting parameters as you do when shooting JPEGs. You don't have to set white balance at all while shooting, and you can usually apply more accurate settings during RAW conversion anyway. The fewer parameters that require your attention, the better you can concentrate on composing and framing your shot.

Perhaps the most important of all the benefits of shooting RAW is nondestructive processing. All processing steps that you perform using a RAW converter are saved separately in an additional file and can be undone or adjusted at any time, while the original image data remains intact and unaffected during the entire workflow. Should you want to, you can apply identical processing steps years later to the same digital original with no loss of image quality.

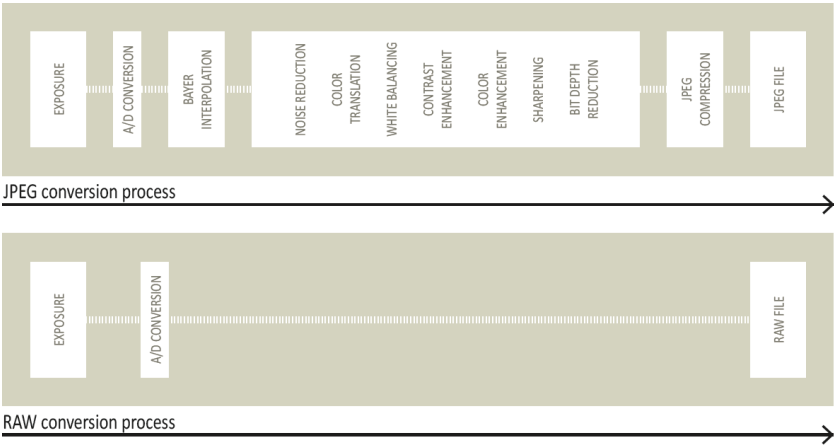


Fig. 279: The processes involved in producing JPEG and RAW digital image files

Shooting RAW ensures maximum image quality and the greatest

possible processing flexibility. Today's computers and RAW converters are much more powerful than the firmware built into most cameras and are thus capable of more accurate and complex interpolation of color values. Image data conversion performed on a computer always produces higher quality results than in-camera processes ([fig. 280](#)).

RAW files contain much more raw image data than JPEG files and give you the greatest possible potential for subsequent correction of shooting errors. JPEG images have a color depth of just 8 bits per channel (bpc) and are capable of reproducing just 256 different tonal values. RAW formats offer 12 or 14 bpc data, which translates to 4,096 or 16,384 reproducible tonal values. Their reduced bit depth means that heavily processed JPEG images often contain obvious color shifts and anomalies in large areas of uniform or graded color. The much finer gradation and the presence of all of the original tonal values in a RAW image allow you more headroom for making subsequent adjustments to exposure. It's much easier to retrieve "lost" detail in under- or overexposed parts of a RAW image than it is for a JPEG.

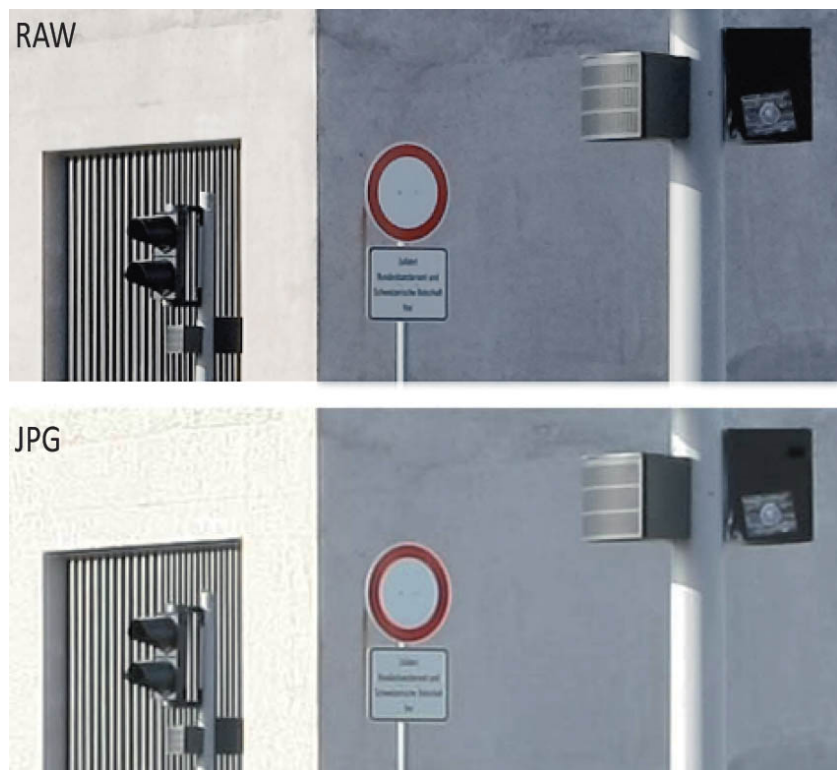


Fig. 280: A comparison of RAW and JPEG image quality

Additionally, RAW images allow complete correction of lens errors such as distortion, vignetting, or chromatic aberration, and many RAW converters have built-in tools that produce much better results than conventional JPEG or TIFF correction processes.

White balance settings adjust the colors recorded by the camera to match the color temperature of the ambient light. It can be tricky to adjust white balance accurately during a shoot without the use of a gray card, and most camera monitors don't reproduce colors reliably enough to judge color temperature accurately on-camera. The ability to adjust white balance using sliders or an eye-dropper tool in a RAW converter is an enormous help. As always, this type of adjustment is lossless and can be undone at any time.

Many cameras perform automatic noise reduction, especially if you are shooting at high ISO speeds. In almost all cases, this process causes a loss of fine image detail and often makes JPEG images look artificially smooth. Image noise is initially more obvious in uncorrected RAW images, but can be more effectively reduced using a RAW converter or third-party tools, as these are more closely matched to specific types of noise.

Shooting in RAW also obviates the need to specify the final image format or color space prior to shooting. These parameters, too, can be specified later during the RAW conversion process.

4.1.4 Disadvantages of Shooting in RAW Format

In addition to its many advantages, RAW also has its downside. RAW image files are much larger than JPEG files shot at the same resolution, so writing data to the memory card takes longer and you need more disk space to store your images. Processing RAW images requires a lot more computer power to produce real time image previews and fast conversions, often causing a reduction in the overall speed of your workflow. Unprocessed and unconverted RAW images are not suitable for Web publishing or other forms of distribution, and every new camera has its own individual RAW format, requiring the manufacturers of RAW processing software to update their products every time a new camera model hits the market.

4.1.5 Conclusions

If you weigh the advantages and disadvantages of RAW, you will quickly come to the conclusion that shooting in RAW is a boon to architectural photography. I recommend that you use the increased image quality and processing flexibility of RAW whenever possible.

Choosing the Best Hardware for the Job

The processor (CPU), the amount of memory (RAM), and, to a degree, the type of graphics card (GPU) you use are the three factors that most influence image processing speed. The specifications of all the other components in your computer are much less important.

A fast processor with four or more cores is ideal for ensuring that things go smoothly when you are applying complex filters or other adjustments to your images. The larger your image files are, the more RAM you will require to work at speed. If your RAM is maxed out, programs like Photoshop use sections of the relatively slow hard disk to temporarily store data, which significantly slows down all image processing tasks. Twelve or sixteen gigabytes of RAM are a sound investment for every serious digital photographer, but only if you are running a 64-bit operating system—32-bit systems can usually only handle a maximum of 4 GB. Use a fast hard disk or solid state drive (SSD) as your system disk. SSDs contain no moving parts and are much faster than conventional hard disks. I recommend that you use two large hard disks in a RAID 1 configuration for image data storage. This ensures secure storage by saving duplicate “mirror” images of all your files and allows you to continue working, even if one disk should fail.

Make sure that your computer’s fans are quiet—there is nothing more annoying than constant background whirl while you are working.

A high-quality monitor is essential when you are processing digital images. Flat-panel LCD models are today’s norm, and have almost completely squeezed conventional CRT models out of the market. The quality of the panel built into a monitor determines its

angle of view, contrast, and color reproduction characteristics. High-quality monitors are generally more expensive than mid-market models, but are definitely worth the extra cost. Wide-gamut models that are capable of displaying an extended range of colors are even more expensive and are useful if you want to process your images using not only the conventional sRGB color space but also others with broader color ranges, such as Adobe RGB.

If your image-processing program has built-in color management functionality, I strongly recommend that you calibrate your monitor using dedicated software and a device called a colorimeter. This device measures the colors produced by your monitor and uses the resulting values to create a color profile that you can then use to control the way your graphics card reproduces color tones. There are also monitors available that can be directly calibrated, but these tend to be very expensive.

4.2 RAW Conversion

The following sections illustrate the steps involved in a typical RAW conversion workflow for an architectural photo. The aim of the initial steps is to produce an image that serves as a basis for a range of subsequent adjustments. I use Adobe Camera Raw (ACR), which is an integral part of both Photoshop and Photoshop Elements and shares many similarities with Adobe's Photoshop Lightroom all-in-one workflow package.

4.2.1A Typical RAW Processing Workflow

1. Image analysis: This sample image shows the façades of a row of modern town houses with varying colors, textures, and material characteristics. The original photo was taken in direct sunlight on a June morning at a distance of 35 meters. I used a wide-angle tilt/shift lens to correct converging verticals during the shoot. The exposure displays no serious under- or overexposure. The RAW converter's sliders are all in their default positions and only the white balance setting saved with the image was automatically detected and loaded by the software ([fig. 281](#)).

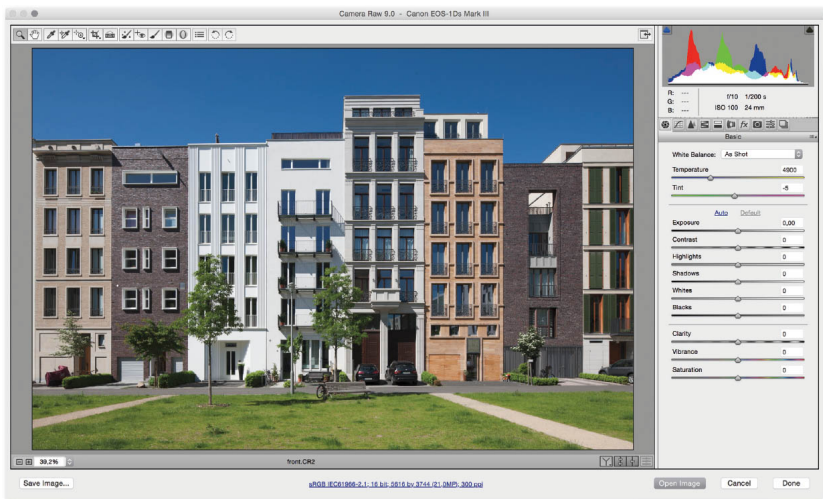


Fig. 281

2. The first step is to adjust white balance. You can select from a range of presets that include *Daylight*, *Cloudy*, *Shade*, and *Auto*, although these rarely provide exactly the result you need. White balance can be adjusted manually using the *Temperature* and *Tint* sliders in ACR's *Basic* tab (fig. 282). To do this, first adjust the *Temperature* slider until you get the basic effect you are looking for and then fine-tune the results using the *Tint* slider ¹. The semi-automatic *White Balance* tool, which can be found in the upper tool bar ², is, theoretically, most accurate, but it isn't ideal for every subject. Using the *White Balance* tool is simple, just click on your image in a place that represents neutral gray ³, or make a selection from a separate photo of a gray card. The software then calculates an appropriate white balance setting based on the selected color. The marked position on the tallest building in my sample image worked very well, but not every image contains such an appropriate color. If this is the case, you will simply have to find the correct setting using the sliders along with some trial and error. One hundred percent perfect white balance is not as important in architectural situations as it is in fashion or advertising photography, and it is often better to use a white balance setting that suits the overall mood of an image.

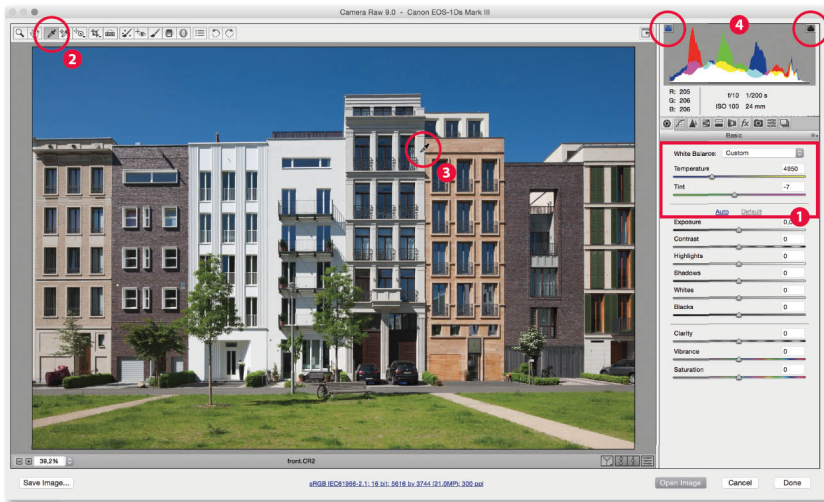


Fig. 282

3. The next step is to take a look at the *Histogram* located above the tool panel. This displays the distribution of tonal values within the image in graphical form and is a great aid to checking exposure ([page 157](#)). Because all monitors display colors, highlights, and shadows differently, a histogram is the only truly reliable way to check your exposure. My sample image has a wide range of tonal values. The triangular icons in the histogram display are *Shadow clipping warning* and *Highlight clipping warning* tools (4). When activated, these indicate the places where the image is irretrievably under- or overexposed in the preview window. Red-colored warnings indicate overexposure and blue indicates clipped shadows. The clipped areas are relatively minor in my sample image, so it should be possible to recover the details in those areas in the next step.

4. The next step is to make further adjustments in the *Basic* panel. The *Exposure* slider effectively adjusts the image's overall brightness and the scale shown corresponds to exposure values of a camera. I left this setting unchanged in my example. I then used the *Shadows* and *Blacks* sliders to adjust the slightly clipped shadows. While *Blacks* allows you to precisely determine which tonal values in the converted image appear completely black, *Shadows* can be used to brighten dark areas without altering the tone of deep blacks ([fig. 283](#)). The *Highlights* slider is designed for retrieving details that

appear to be missing in brighter image areas. But be warned: using this slider too much produces unrealistic-looking results. The *Whites* slider is the counterpart to the *Blacks* slider, and it adjusts highlight clipping. If the ambient light has produced too much contrast in your midtones, move the *Contrast* slider slightly to the left. This compresses the histogram curve and reduces contrast for the affected areas. If necessary, contrast can be selectively increased later on. This adjustment can also be used to increase contrast, but remember that it only affects midtones. The *Clarity* slider can be used to increase local contrast but quickly produces unwanted halos and a slightly “dirty” overall look in an image, so take care when adjusting it. Again, I left this particular setting unchanged for my sample image. The *Vibrance* and *Saturation* settings can be left alone at this stage too, and can be selectively adjusted later (*Vibrance* controls the lower-saturated colors without affecting the rest, while *Saturation* changes affect all image colors equally).

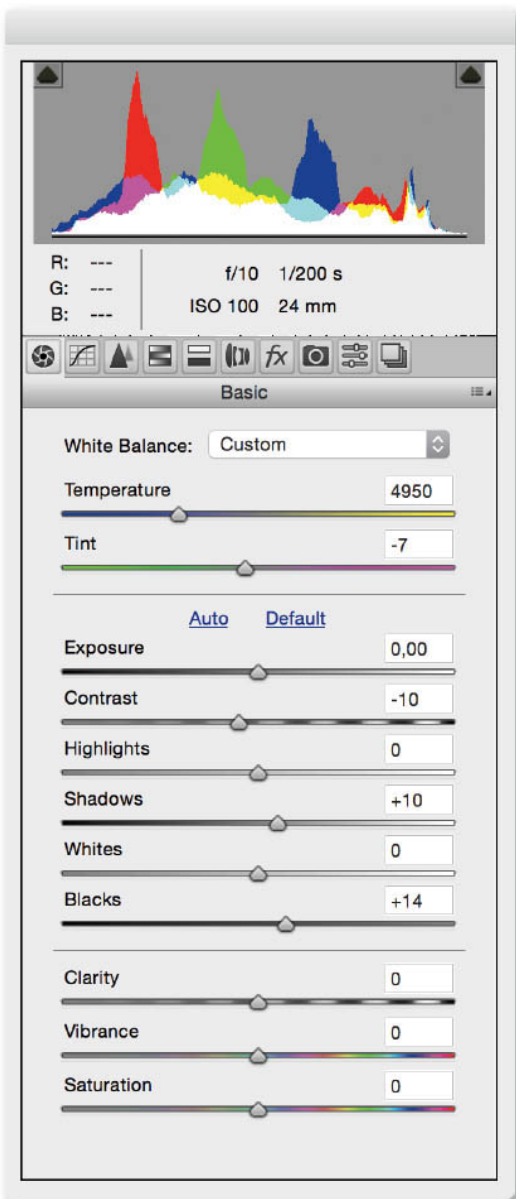


Fig. 283

5. The *Tone Curve* can be used to perform various fine-tuning steps and is a tried and true way to make targeted tonal adjustments in selected image areas. The ACR version of the tool allows you to adjust the

curve either directly by manipulating control points on the curve or indirectly by adjusting the *Highlights*, *Lights*, *Darks*, and *Shadows* sliders located beneath the curve graph. These enable you to selectively brighten or darken specific tonal values. Both methods can be used to achieve the same effects and which you use is a matter of taste. My sample image required only slight brightening in the midtones (fig. 284). In others cases, it's often a good idea to increase overall contrast or brighten darker tones using an S-shaped curve. You can also use the *Targeted Adjustment* tool located in the toolbar and the *Parametric curve* to directly brighten or darken selected image areas by dragging the cursor in the preview window. The tool's handling is simple and intuitive.

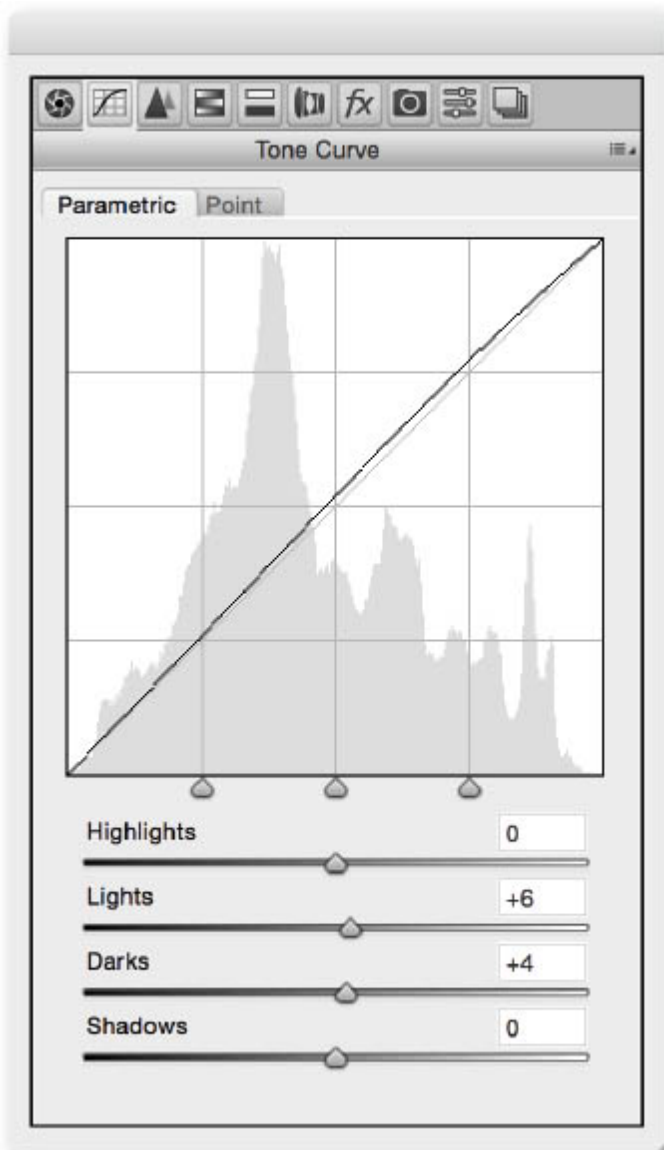


Fig. 284

6. Image sharpening is generally the final step in a digital image processing workflow, so I recommend that, at this point, you apply only slight sharpening in the *Detail* tab. If you apply excessive sharpening too soon, you will have to deal with unwanted

sharpening artifacts later. Use an *Amount* setting between *10* and *20*, a Radius value of *1* or less, and a *Detail* setting between *5* and *15*. The *Masking* slider can be left at its low default setting. To check image sharpness, select an image area with plenty of detail and switch to the 100% or 200% view in the preview window (fig. 285). ACR's *Noise Reduction tool* is fairly basic, and there are a number of Photoshop plug-ins available that address various specific types of noise and produce better results. In my example, I deactivated the reduction of the slight analog-style luminance noise by selecting a *Luminance Contrast* value of *0*. I only slightly reduced the blotchy color noise using the *Color*, *Color Details*, and *Color Smoothness* sliders.

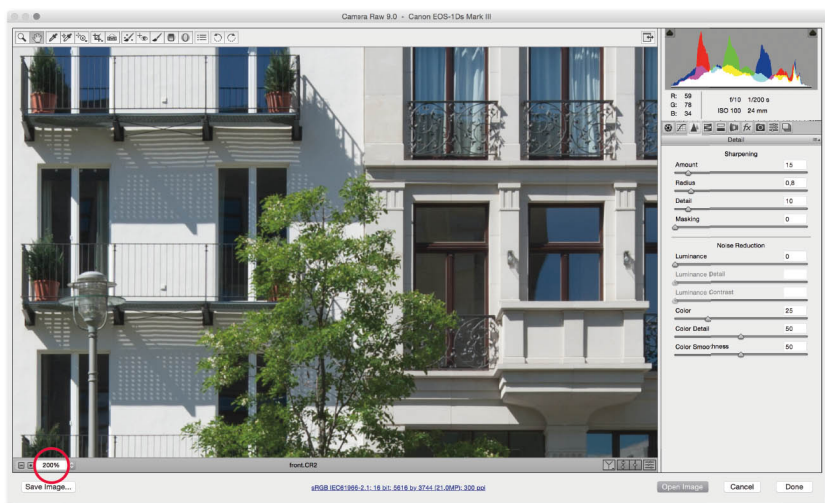


Fig. 285

7. The *HSL/Grayscale* tab offers a wide range of color adjustment tools. HSL stands for *Hue/Saturation/Luminance*, and the Hue tab is great for making fine color corrections. I used it to correct the typical (digital) red cast in the sky (fig. 286). The *Saturation* tab is used to make adjustments to color intensity, and I used it to strengthen the color of the sky (fig. 287). Theoretically, you can use the tool to desaturate complete image areas and increase saturation in others—effects that can produce quite surreal-looking images. However, I only usually use it to make corrections that arise from other correction processes: While manually brightened shadows or

darkened highlights automatically appear well saturated, shadow areas that have been further darkened or highlights that have been brightened tend to look somewhat desaturated. The *Luminance* tab is used to regulate the brightness of individual colors, and I used it to darken the blues (to further intensify the color of the sky) and to slightly brighten the red and yellow tones (fig. 288). If you want to convert an image to black-and-white, check the *Convert to Grayscale* box. The three HSL tabs will then be displayed in a single tab called *Grayscale Mix* in which you can adjust the intensity of the various grayscale tones. These allow you to produce monochrome images with widely differing looks. Here too, the same adjustments can be made using the *Targeted Adjustment tool*.

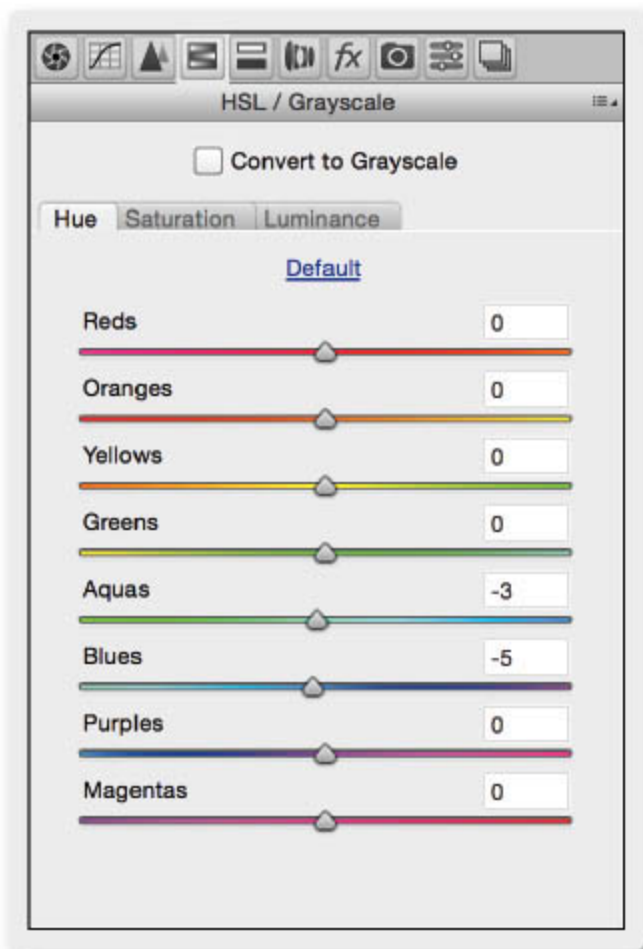


Fig. 286

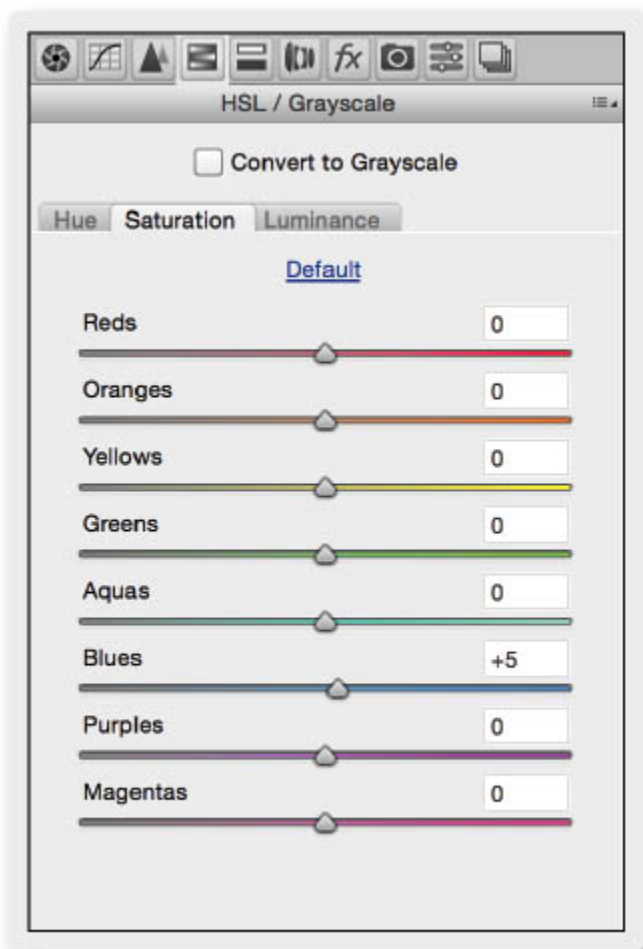


Fig. 287

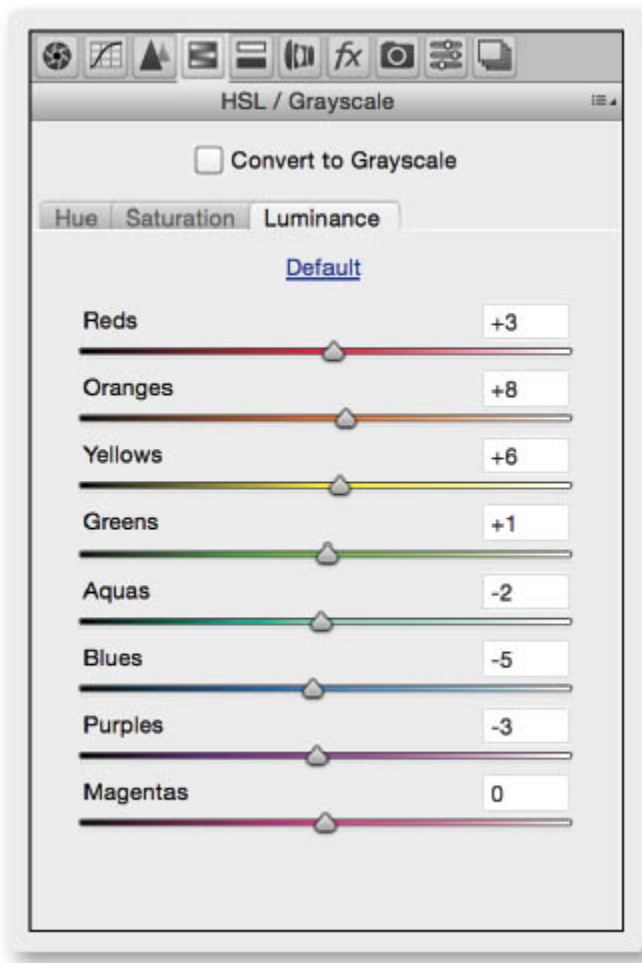


Fig. 288

8. The **Split Toning** tab enables you to make separate adjustments to highlight and shadow areas. This can be useful, for example, if the shadow areas in an image contain color casts but the rest of the image requires no correction. This tool can also be used to give an image a warmer or cooler overall look, as I did with my sample image (fig. 289), or used for tinting images that you have already converted to grayscale.

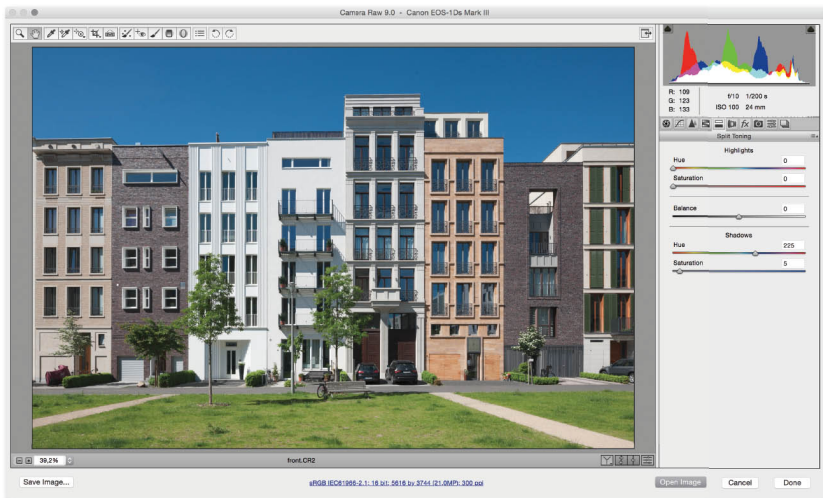


Fig. 289

9. The *Lens Corrections* tab contains tools that are very important for architectural photographers. The tool's *Profile* tab contains sliders for correcting distortion and vignetting, as well as the selection parameters for a wide range of lenses for which specific errors can be corrected automatically (fig. 290). The *Correction Amount* control section allows you to reduce or increase the strength of each individual adjustment. If your particular lens hasn't yet been profiled by Adobe, or if you're using an adapted lens whose settings won't transfer to the Exif metadata and thus can't be read by ACR, you can use the free Adobe Lens Profile Creator software to create your own profile. Tilt/shift lenses cannot be easily profiled because the nature of the errors they produce changes according to the shift-settings you have selected. The shift lens used in the example produced only subtle vignetting thanks to the optic's large image circle. Also, the lens was only slightly shifted, and the exposure was not shot at the maximum aperture. The distortion is also insignificant, which makes adjusting both of these parameters unnecessary. The Lens Correction panel's second tab, *Color*, allows you to adjust chromatic aberrations (fringing) automatically (fig. 291), and you further have the option in the *Defringe* correction area to manually remove stubborn purple or green color fringes. The *Manual* tab, which is the third tab in this panel, offers the ability to apply automatic perspective corrections under the *Upright* control section. The effectiveness of these

adjustments highly depend on the subject (fig. 292). The *Auto* button applies a set of perspective adjustments. Pressing the *Level* button causes ACR to try to ensure that all horizontal details appear perfectly level. Aside from the *Auto* button, the *Vertical* button, which attempts to recognize and correct converging vertical lines, is the most applicable to architectural photography. The *Full* button offers a more comprehensive solution comprising horizontal, vertical, and automatic perspective adjustments. The *Transform* control section gives you the ability to manually modulate individual parameters such as *Distortion*, *Vertical*, *Horizontal*, *Rotate*, *Scale*, and *Aspect*. It's often easier to fine-tune these settings precisely using Photoshop later on in the workflow.

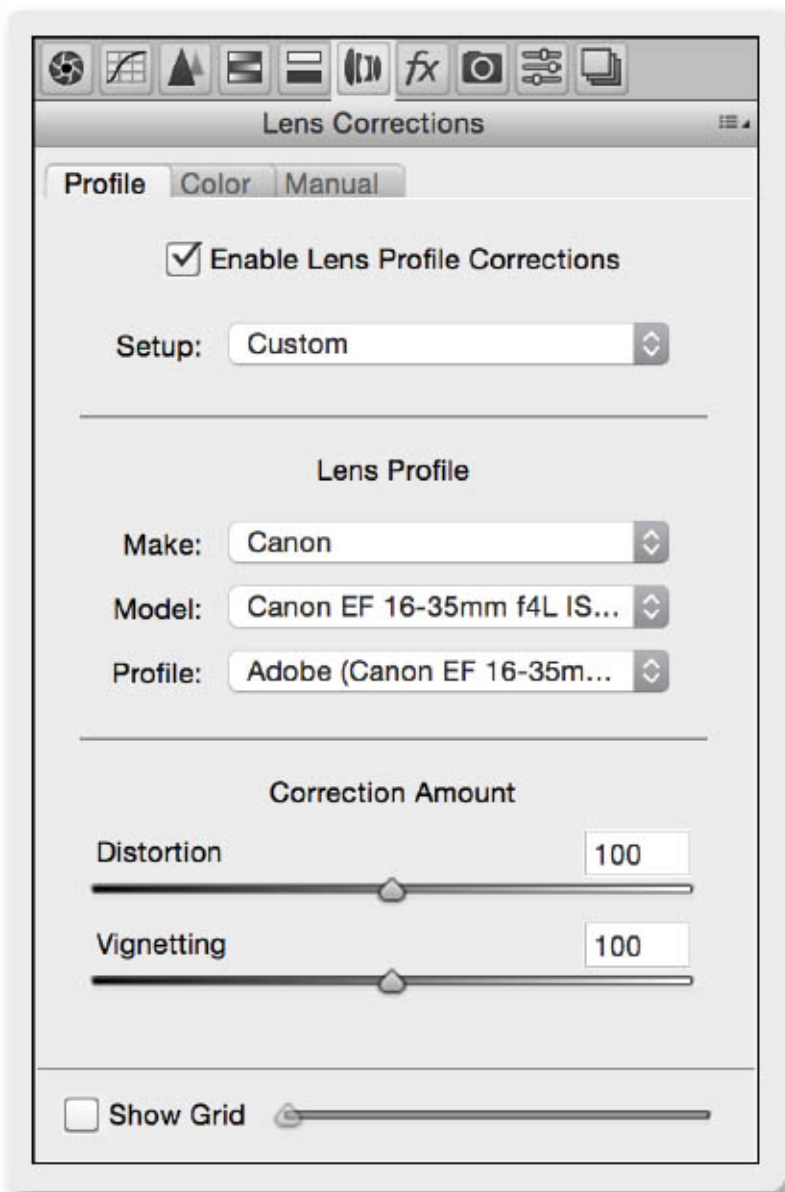


Fig. 290

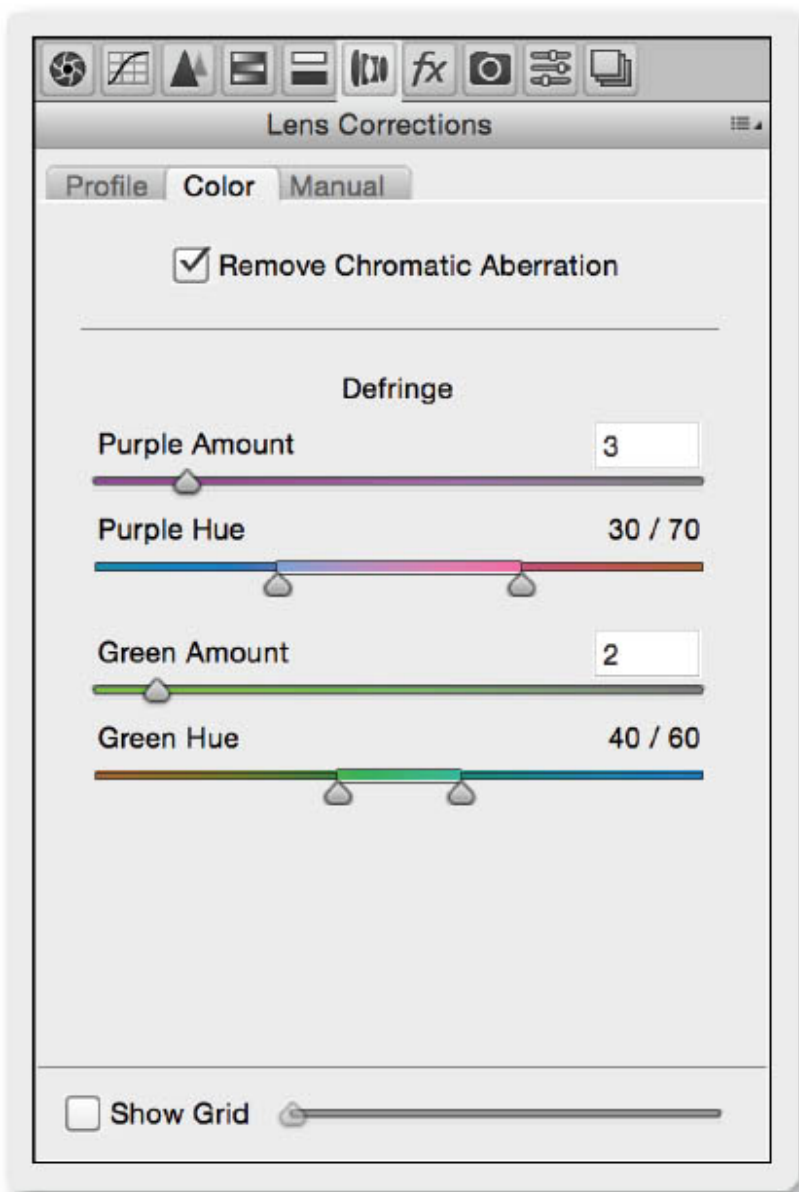


Fig. 291

11. The *Camera Calibration* tab allows you to select and adjust custom camera profiles; for example, to permanently counteract a known color cast produced by a particular camera. ACR makes it possible to save *Presets* with individual settings that can in turn be easily applied to other pictures later on. The *Snapshots* tab enables you to take “snapshots” of various versions of your image for recall and comparison during current or future processing sessions (fig. 293).
12. Other ACR tools (fig. 294) include the *Crop* tool **1** and the extremely useful *Straighten* tool **2**, which perfectly aligns your image to a horizontal or vertical line that you drag across the preview image. If you want to correct distortion later in your workflow, don’t use either of these tools at this stage, as they can only be applied to the entire image. The *Spot Removal* tool **3** is intuitive to use and is great for removing flaws caused by dust spots on the image sensor. The *Adjustment Brush* tool **4** is used for making selective tonal value corrections (fig. 295), and the *Graduated Filter* **5** as well as the *Radial Filter* tool **6** apply highly variable gradients to digital images.

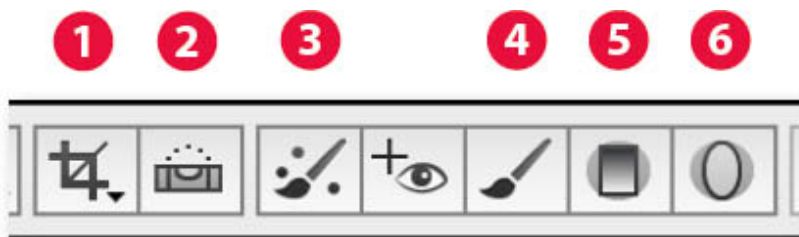


Fig. 294

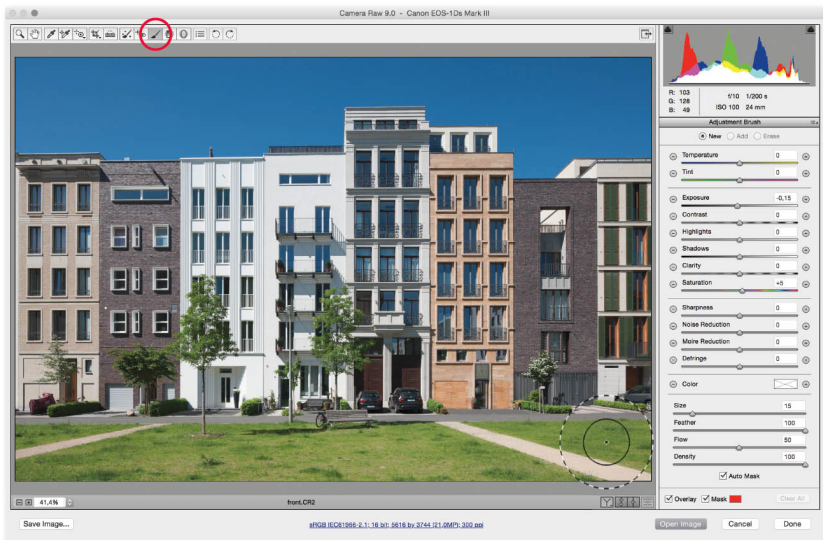


Fig. 295

13. Before clicking the *Open Image* button to start the conversion, click on the blue underlined image data at the bottom edge of the ACR preview window to perform a final check of your *Workflow Options* (fig. 296). Here, you can select a color space—*sRGB IEC61966-2.1* is usually the best choice for images you want to display on the Web or have printed by a lab, while the larger *Adobe RGB (1998)* color space is better for pre-press work or if you are using an output device such as an wide-gamut monitor or a high-end inkjet printer that supports Adobe RGB. Select the *16 Bits/Channel Depth* setting to ensure that your image retains the maximum possible range of color data. This does, however, require additional computing power, so select the *8 Bits/Channel* option if you are using an older computer. Leave the *Size* setting at its default value unless you are using a large-format printer or some other special application. In this case, you will achieve better results if you reinterpolate the image now, as long as the program still has access to the raw image data. You can select any *Resolution* setting, as this doesn't affect absolute resolution and only determines the size at which the image can be reproduced using a specific pixel density. If you want to perform pre-output sharpening, the *Sharpen For* setting includes options for *Screen*, *Glossy Paper*, or *Matte Paper* in *Low*, *Standard*, and *High* amounts.

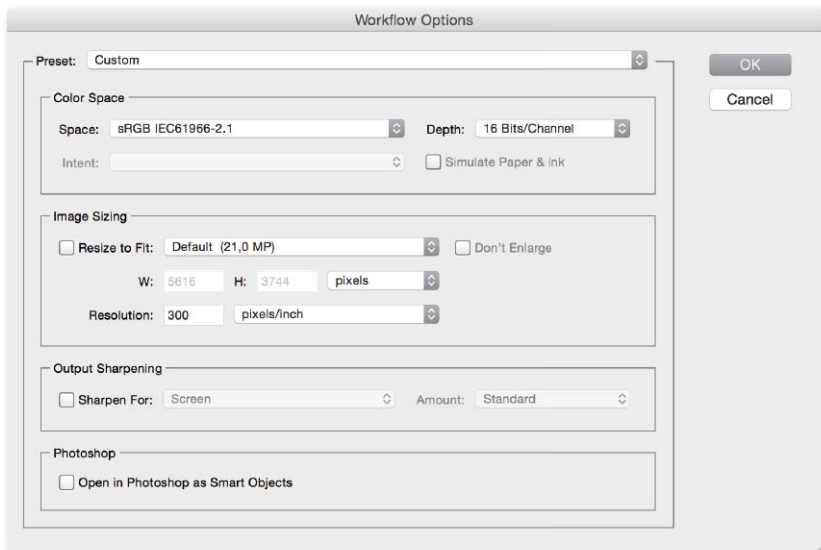


Fig. 296



Fig. 297: Final edited image

Adobe Camera Raw Conversion Workflow

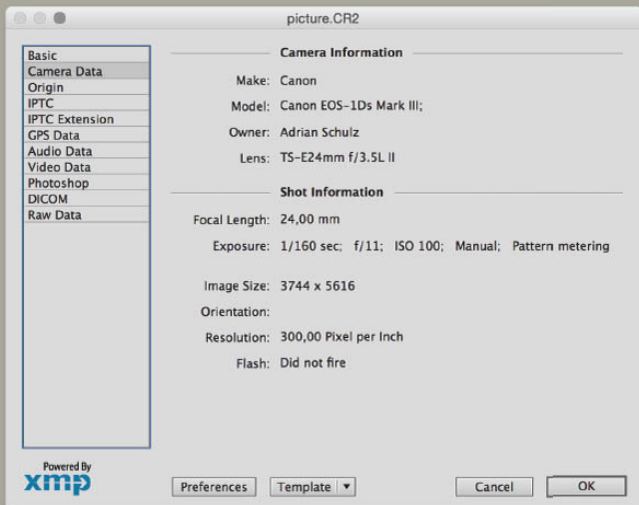
Overview

- ▶ *Set white balance (individually according to the image being processed)*
- ▶ *General image optimization (overall exposure, contrast, highlights and shadows) using the histogram*
- ▶ *Fine-tuning using the Curves tool*
- ▶ *Perform moderate basic sharpening*
- ▶ *Optional: Select HSL/Grayscale settings*
- ▶ *Remove/add color casts as desired using Split Toning*
- ▶ *Perform lens corrections and perspective correction as necessary*
- ▶ *Add Grain/Post Crop Vignetting effects as desired*
- ▶ *Perform final touches: Remove dust spots, crop/straighten, perform selective corrections as desired*
- ▶ *Check Workflow Options*
- ▶ *Convert image*

Exif Data

The Exif (Exchangeable Image File) data format was formulated in 1998 and is used by virtually all digital camera manufacturers to record ancillary image data tags. These tags are written to an image file's so-called "header," and are directly embedded in JPEG and TIFF image data. Exif data fields include shutter speed, aperture, date, time, focal length, ISO value, flash settings, white balance, and many others. This information can help you to discern why an image is particularly effective or why it didn't turn out as you expected.

Many image processing programs can access Exif data directly and can use it to sort and analyze individual or multiple images.



Detail of the Exif data associated with a RAW image file



4.3Post-processing

4.3.1Image Adjustments

Once you have converted a RAW image, your image data is in the best possible state for making individual corrections and adjustments. The following sections describe a typical image correction workflow. The steps I describe and the order I perform them in are by no means mandatory, and everyone, sooner or later, develops their own personal working style. However, some steps are better performed before others if you want to produce consistently good results. If you are just starting out, the following workflow provides a great set of basic guidelines.

Workflow: Image Adjustments

1. We have now converted our sample image to 16 bpc (bits per color channel) color depth, adjusted its white balance, performed a couple of minor corrections to tonal values, and reduced the amount of visible chromatic aberrations and vignetting ([fig. 298](#)).

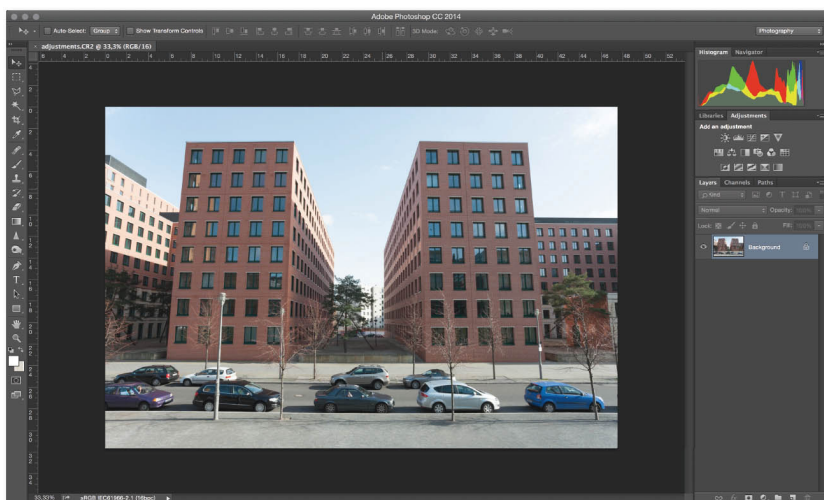


Fig. 298

2. Changes to framing or a correction of converging verticals should be done at the same time as, or after, the correction of lens-induced distortions, never before. Distortion correction is only precise if the entire image is processed.

Correcting perspective and distortion in Photoshop: If you haven't already corrected distortion using ACR, the Photoshop

Filter > Lens Correction tool is perfect for making automatic and manual corrections to perspective and lens errors. In order to perform automatic corrections, the *Auto Correction* tool requires Exif metadata with information about the camera, lens, focal length, and f-stop setting, as well as an appropriate lens profile. All you then have to do is check the *Geometric Distortion* option and Photoshop will calculate the appropriate correction values and apply them to your image (fig. 299). You can also select the *Auto Scale Image* option if desired. Manual distortion correction can be performed using the *Remove Distortion* slider in the *Custom* tab (fig. 300). For my sample image, I moved the slider slightly to the right to correct the barrel distortion that is typical in images shot using wide-angle lenses ❶. The ideal correction values depend on the lens you are using and its focal length. Perspective correction and distortion correction influence each other reciprocally, so it is easier to find the best settings if you perform perspective correction at this stage, too. On the one hand, distorted lines are more obvious if perspective has already been corrected, while on the other hand, it is easier to align straight lines to a perspective grid if they have already been straightened. I used the *Vertical Perspective* slider in the *Transform* panel ❷ to correct the converging lines on my sample image. The *Horizontal Perspective* slider is great for correcting errors that occur if the film/sensor plane wasn't parallel to the building's façade during shooting. The *Straighten* tool ❸ functions in exactly the same way as the ACR version described in the previous section, and I used it to correct the very slight rotation in my sample image. All perspective and distortion errors have now been corrected. Click *OK* to confirm them and return to the main program window.

Using plug-ins to correct distortion and perspective errors:

There are also various third-party tools available for correcting distortion and perspective errors, such as PTLens (for PCs and Mac) and LensFix (for Mac only). These tools correct errors based on a comprehensive database of the anomalies produced by a wide range of camera/lens combinations, and are even capable of automatically correcting wave distortion and distortions resulting from shift lenses (with manual intermediate steps). Here too, the software uses Exif data to determine the appropriate correction parameters. I used the plug-in version of PTLens to correct my sample image. Once installed, the plug-in can be found under *Filter > ePaperPress > PTLens*. Now go to the *Barrel-Pincushion* panel in the plug-in

window (fig. 301). The software usually detects the correct camera and lens models immediately, but some combinations require manual input. If the *Preview* box is checked and the *Barrel-Pincushion* option is selected in the *Correct* panel, the correction values stored in the database will be applied to the image in the preview window in real time. The *Perspective* tab includes intuitive tools for correcting converging lines, and activating the built-in grid makes aligning your image much easier. You can also shift the entire image up, down, or to the side using the four-way button in the same tab. It is preferable to correct vignetting and chromatic aberrations during RAW conversion, but if you haven't already done so, PTLens includes appropriate tools. Click *OK* to apply your selected settings and return to the main Photoshop window.

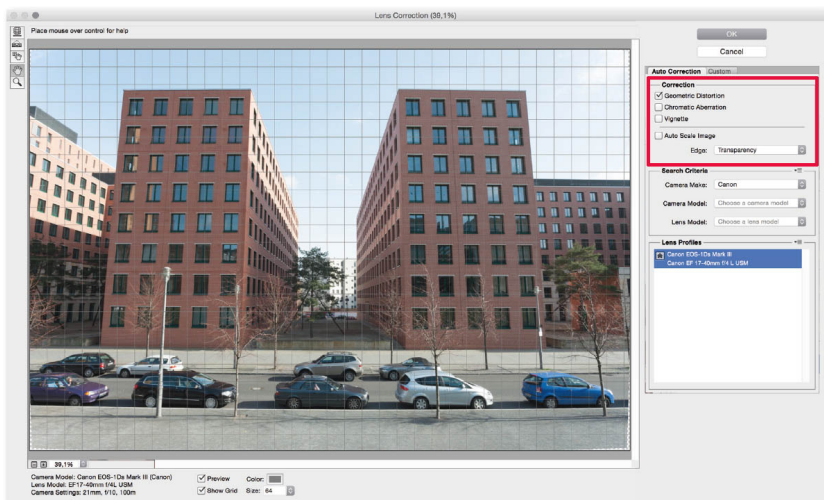


Fig. 299

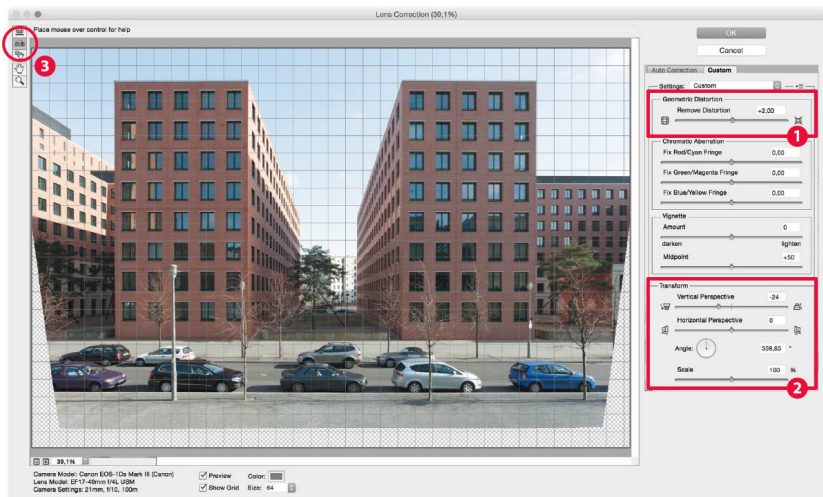


Fig. 300

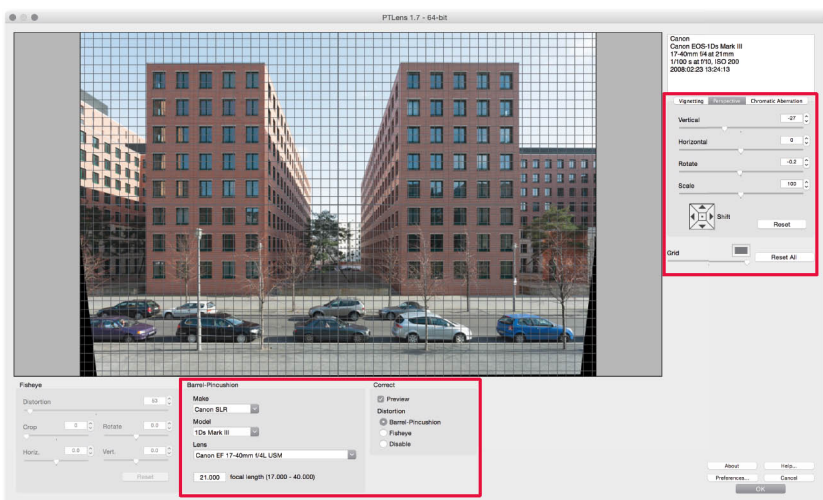


Fig. 301

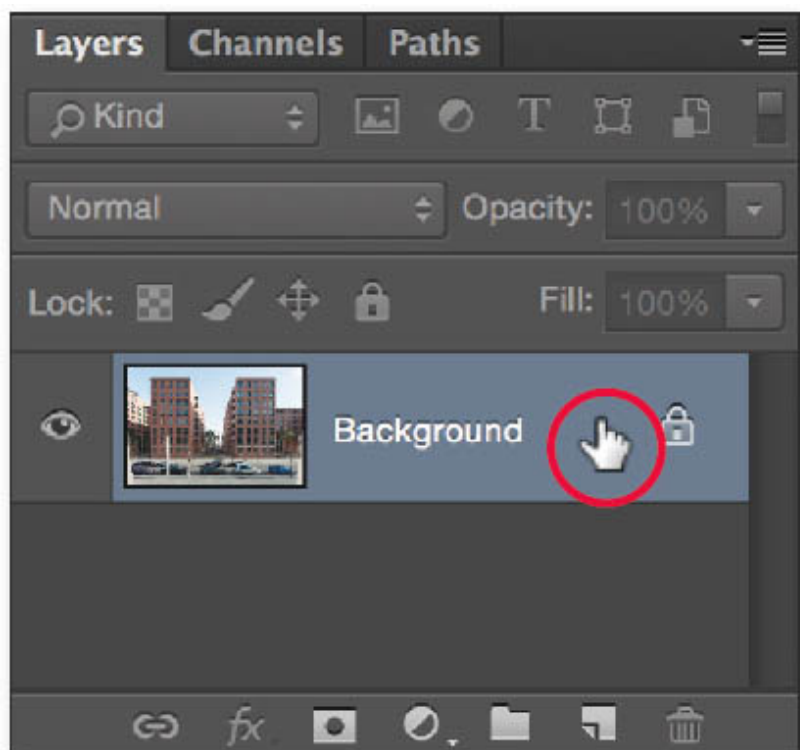


Fig. 302

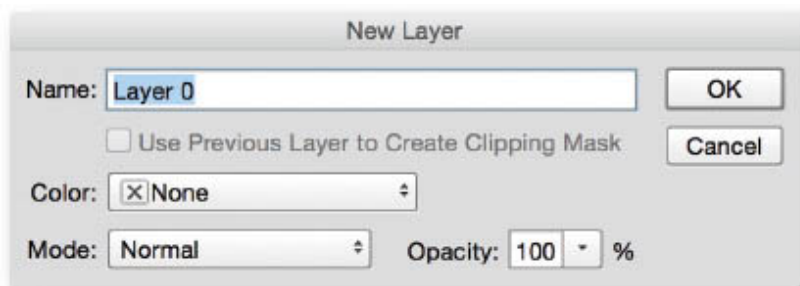


Fig. 303

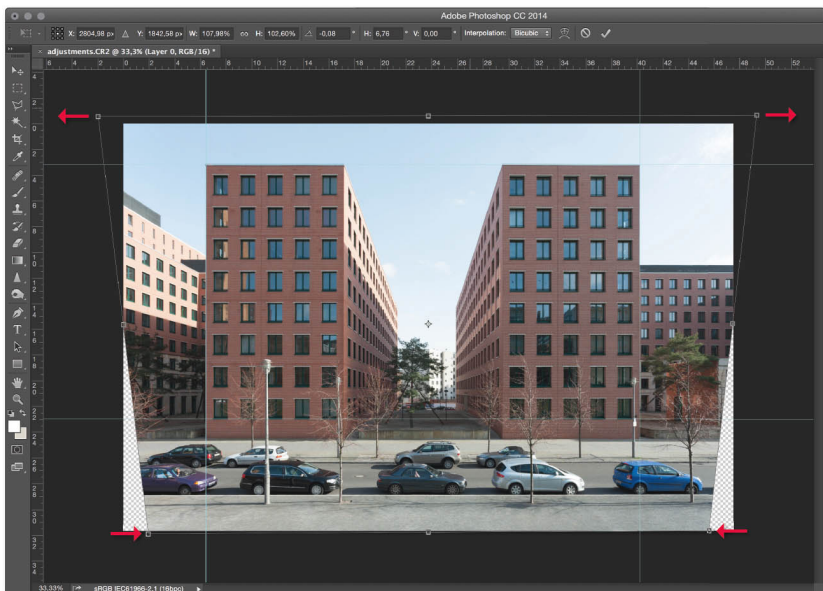


Fig. 304

Correcting perspective using the Transform command: You can also correct perspective in images that require no further distortion correction using the Photoshop *Edit > Transform* command. Either drag Guides across your image or show the grid using the commands in the *View > Show* menu. Convert the background layer into a transformable layer by double clicking its thumbnail in the Layers menu (fig. 302) and then clicking *OK* in the following dialog (fig. 303). The background layer will now be called *Layer 0*. Now use the *Edit > Transform > Perspective* or *Distort* commands to distort your image to suit your purposes (fig. 304). If you move the upper corners apart during the transformation, it is important to move the lower corners closer together in order to prevent the finished image from appearing vertically compressed.



Fig. 305

Cropping your image: The next logical step is to crop your adjusted image. Drag a marquee around the appropriate area using the *Crop* tool and confirm your selection with a double click (fig. 305). In my example, I preserved the greatest possible image area, which actually altered the aspect ratio. If you want to use a specific aspect ratio, use the *Rectangular Marquee* tool to make your selection, select the *Style > Fixed Ratio* option in the toolbar and enter your desired values in the boxes. You can then drag a marquee and make your selection using the *Image > Crop* command. If your selection extends beyond the edge of the image in places where image detail is uniform, you can use the *Polygon Lasso* tool to select the excess image space and use the *Edit > Fill* command with the *Use > Content-Aware* option activated to fill the blank space. The quality of the results will depend on the type of detail you are attempting to duplicate. Alternative ways to round out an image are to use the *Clone Stamp* tool or by simply making a tighter crop.

3. The following section describes various ways of making corrections to image brightness. **Selective darkening:** I decided to first darken the sky in my sample image. If the division between the building and the sky is clearly defined, you can use the *Magic Wand* tool with the Shift key pressed to make multiple selections. If the area you wish to select contains complex shapes, such as a tree, it is probably better to

use a different method. Selecting the *Select > Color Range* command opens a dialog in which you can precisely determine which colors to select. Choose the *Select > Sampled Colors* option, activate the *Localized Color Clusters* option, and click on the sky in the preview window. The selected areas are then marked in white and non-selected areas in black (fig. 306). The *Add to Sample* eyedropper can then be used to add all other tones in the sky to your sample. Leave the *Fuzziness* slider near the left-hand end of the scale, but check to see if slight movements up or down produce better results for your particular image. The same is true for the *Range* slider, although you will probably need to use higher base values than for *Fuzziness* (fig. 307). The aim of the exercise is to create a clear transition between the sky and the other elements in the picture. Click *OK* to view your selection in the main preview window. You will notice this technique also selects other areas with tones similar to those in the sky. To remove these from your selection use the *Polygon Lasso* tool in *Subtract From Selection* mode (fig. 308) to select all areas that aren't part of the sky. Any minor inconsistencies can be corrected later using the layer mask that this step creates. You can now optimize your selection using the *Refine Edge* dialog, which you can open either by clicking the button in the toolbar or via the *Select > Refine Edge* command (fig. 309). Activate the *Smart Radius* option in the *Edge Detection* section and set the other options according to the nature of your image. Trial and error or using previously successful values are the best ways to find the ideal *Radius* setting. I find that values between 0 and 5 are generally the most effective, and that using the *Zoom* tool helps us to accurately judge the results. Using *Radius* values that are too high for finely textured or partially translucent objects such as trees produces inaccurate selections. Leave the *Smooth* and *Contrast* sliders either at the left of the scale or set to 0 and select a *Feather* value below 1. Use a *Shift Edge* value between +5% and +10% to prevent fringing at the edges of your selection. This enlarges your selection to a minimal degree (fig. 310). Click *OK* to return to the main program window. Leave your selection active and select the *Curves* menu either directly from the *Adjustments* panel (fig. 311) or by using the *Layer > New Adjustment Layer > Curves* command. Regardless of the method, your selection will no longer be active, and the program creates a new adjustment layer and layer mask called *Curves 1* (fig. 312). A layer mask is a grayscale image used to

determine the opacity of the layer it is associated with. Black areas are reproduced fully transparent and white areas are completely opaque. Layer masks can thus be used to show or hide specific areas within an image without actually deleting any pixels. When you are fine-tuning an image, hidden image areas can be easily shown by painting in the layer mask using a white brush. To do this, simply click on the layer mask with the Alt key pressed **1** and paint into the resulting black-and-white image. Before I adjusted the layer mask, I darkened the sky in my sample image by dragging the curve downward **2**. Thanks to the layer mask, all adjustments are only applied to the currently active selection.

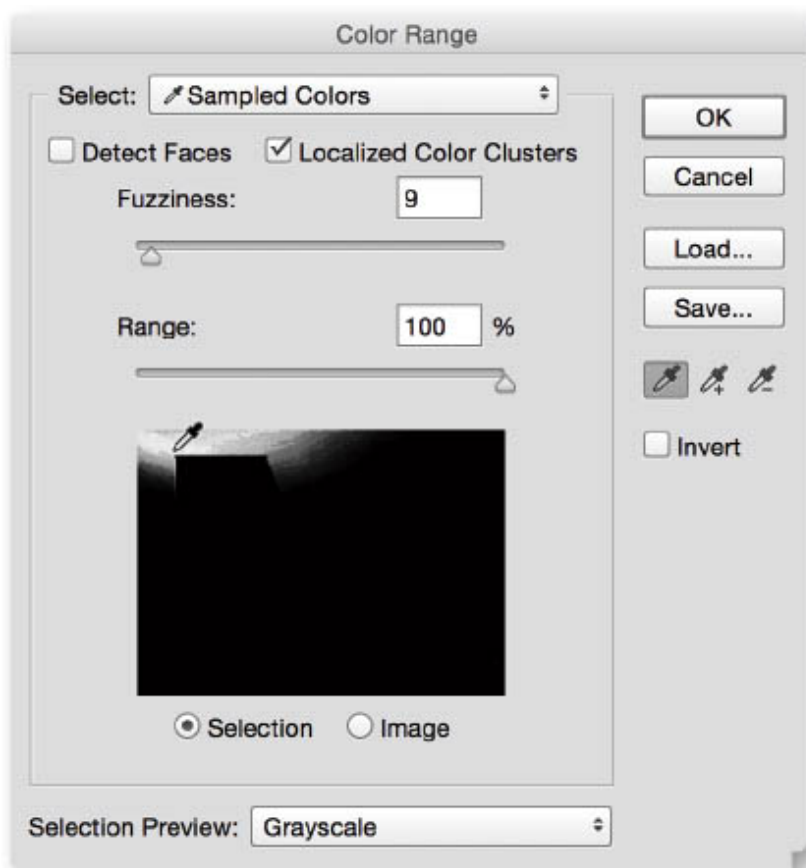


Fig. 306

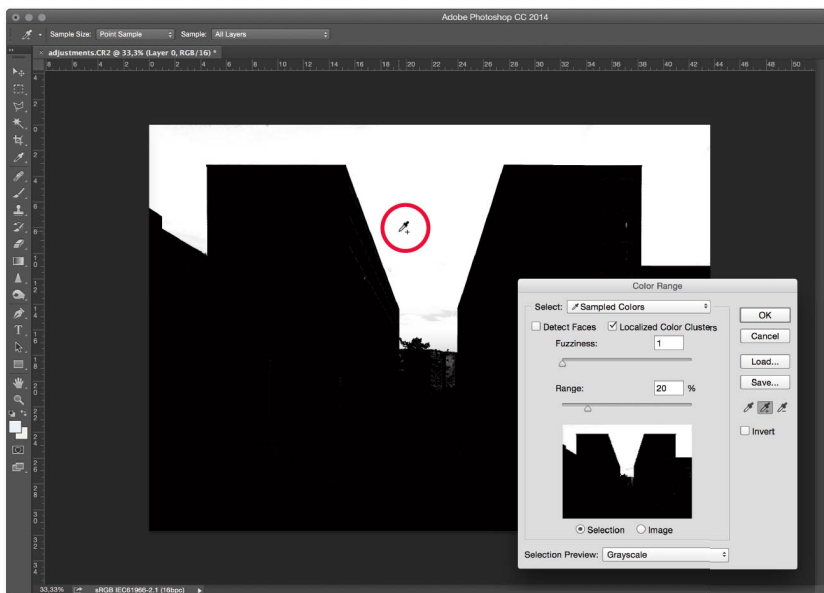


Fig. 307

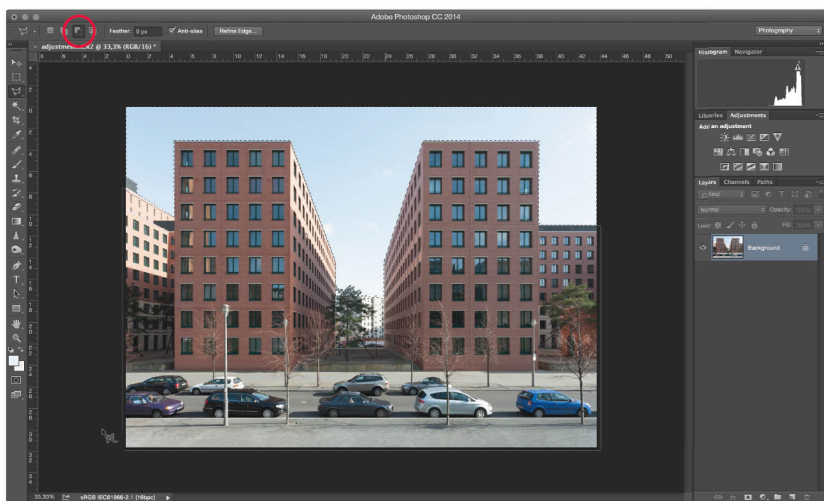


Fig. 308

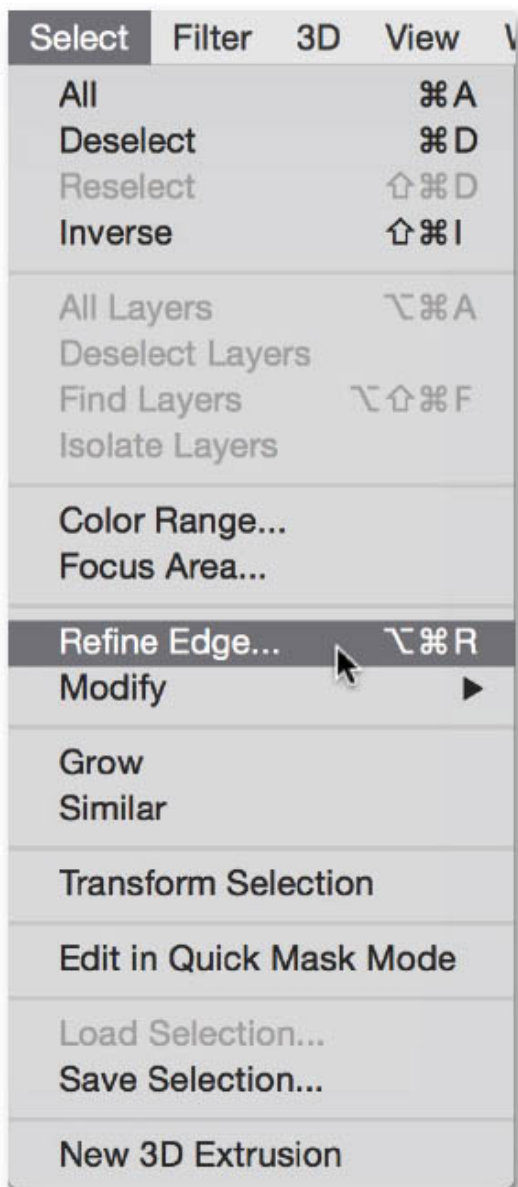


Fig. 309

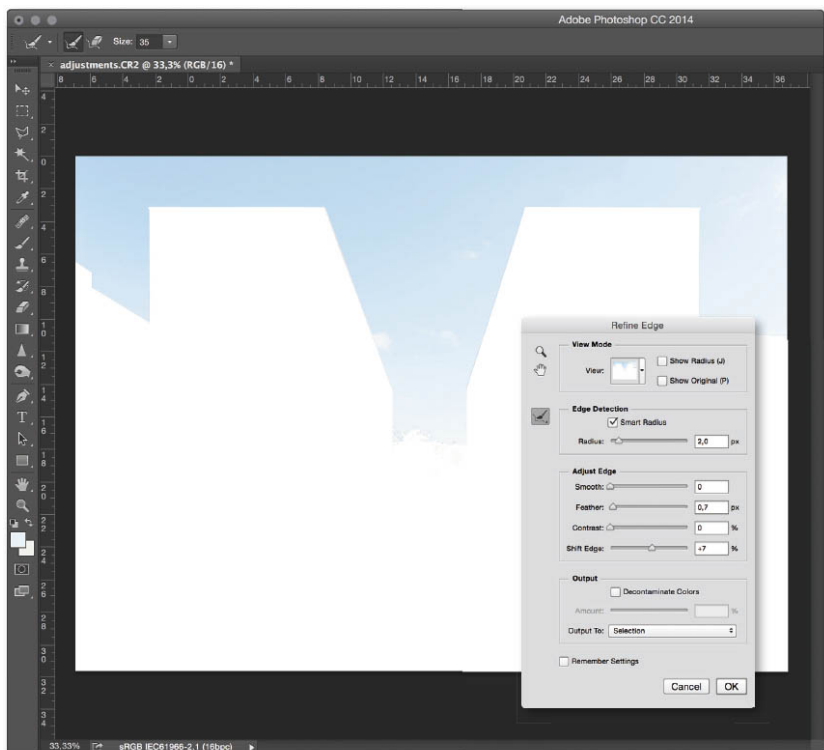


Fig. 310

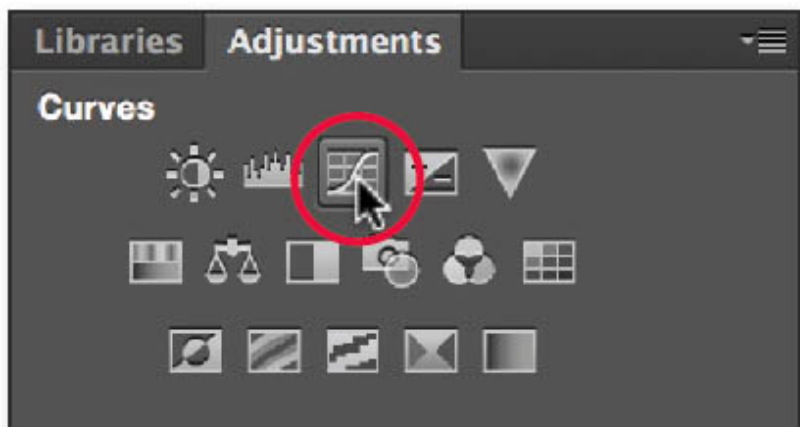


Fig. 311

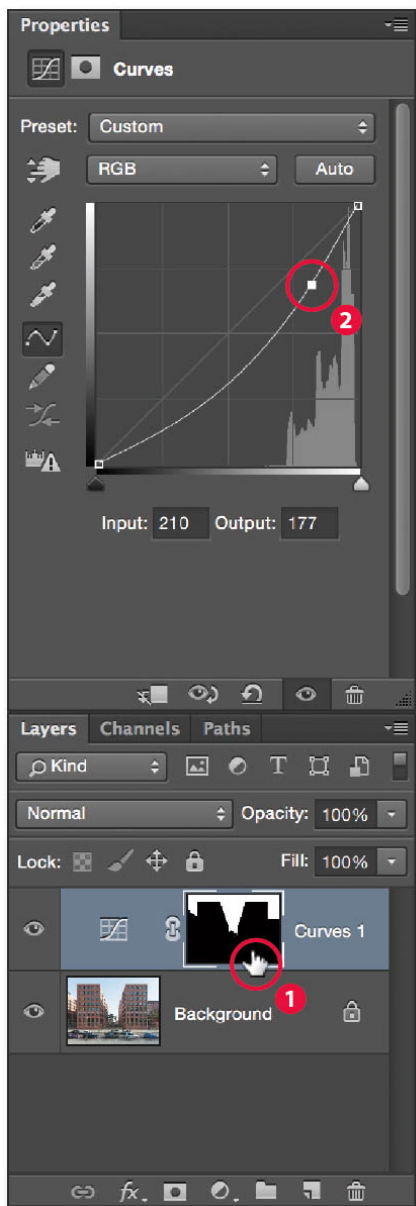


Fig. 312

Selective brightening: The next step involves adding another adjustment layer. Once again, select the *Curves* dialog in the *Adjustments* panel, this time with no active selection. To keep track

of your work, I recommend that you name each layer individually when you are working with multiple layers. I will now use my newly named *Lighten* layer to selectively brighten parts of my sample image (fig. 313). Theoretically, I could once again select the *Color Range* command, select the *Shadows* instead of the sky and simply blur the layer mask. However, I would like to demonstrate an alternative method: Activate the *Lighten* layer by clicking on its thumbnail and slightly brighten the entire image using the *Curves* or *Levels* dialog. Now activate the layer mask and fill it with black (fig. 314) using either the *Edit > Fill* or the *Image > Adjustments > Invert* (Ctrl-I/Cmd-I) command. The adjustments just made will disappear. Now select a large, soft brush using the *Brush* tool (fig. 315) ①, set the foreground color to *White*, and reduce opacity to a low value (30% in my example) ②. Use the brush to paint areas that are too dark in the active black layer mask ③. This once again makes the areas I previously brightened visible. Alternative methods for brightening and darkening specific image areas are described in section 4.3.2.

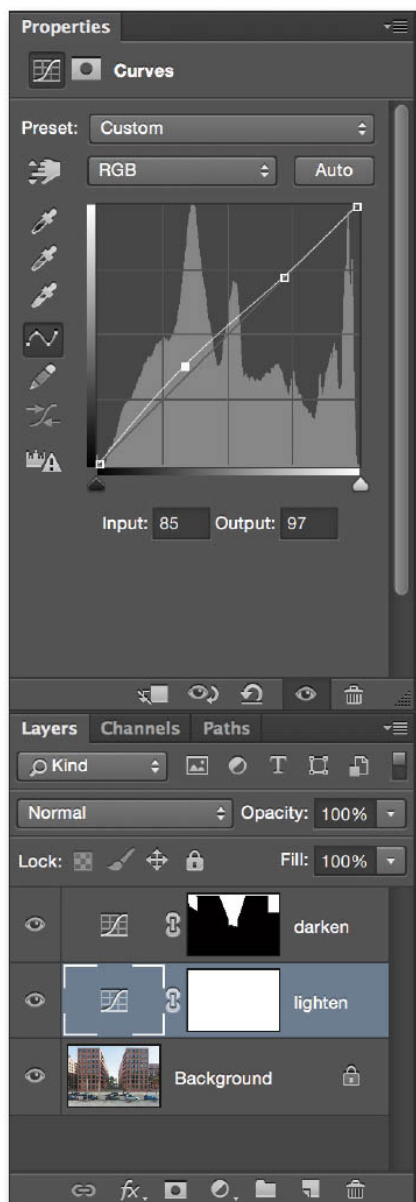


Fig. 313

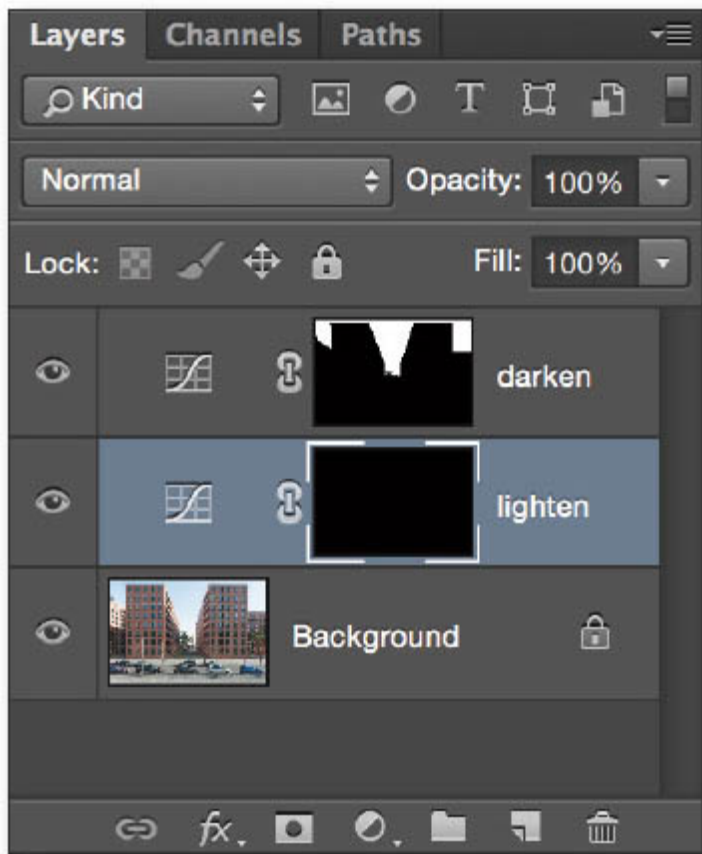


Fig. 314

4. Now that I have completed my major adjustments to brightness, the next step is to reduce **noise** for images that have been strongly brightened or that were shot using high ISO values. Photoshop includes the *Filter > Noise > Reduce Noise* command for doing just that (fig. 316). My sample image doesn't require any noise reduction, but if you do decide to reduce noise, take care to apply the filter you use in moderation, as noise reduction always reduces the quality of fine details. Generally, a slightly noisy image looks better than one in which detail has been softened too much. In addition to the standard Photoshop tool, there are a number of effective noise reduction plug-ins available, including Noiseware, Neat Image, Topaz DeNoise, or Noise Ninja, all of which can be worth spending

a little extra money.

5. I can now perform any additional **color corrections** that I didn't make at the RAW conversion stage. The *Selective Color* dialog in the *Adjustments* panel (also reachable via *Layer > New Adjustment Layer > Selective Color*) is great for performing targeted adjustments (fig. 317). The adjustments you can make vary enormously and depend entirely on the subject and the type of image you want to produce, so experience and experimentation are once again the best yardsticks for finding the right settings. I decided to give my sample image a slightly cooler look using a new layer (*Layer > New > Layer*) in *Hue* mode (fig. 318). I then used a blue tone to fill the layer and reduced opacity to 8%. The result is an overall slight blue tone that can be selectively applied or reduced using a layer mask (fig. 319). An alternative way to produce the same effect is using the *Photo Filter* dialog in the *Adjustments* panel (also reachable via *Layer > New Adjustment Layer > Photo Filter*), which can also be selectively applied or undone at any stage (fig. 320).

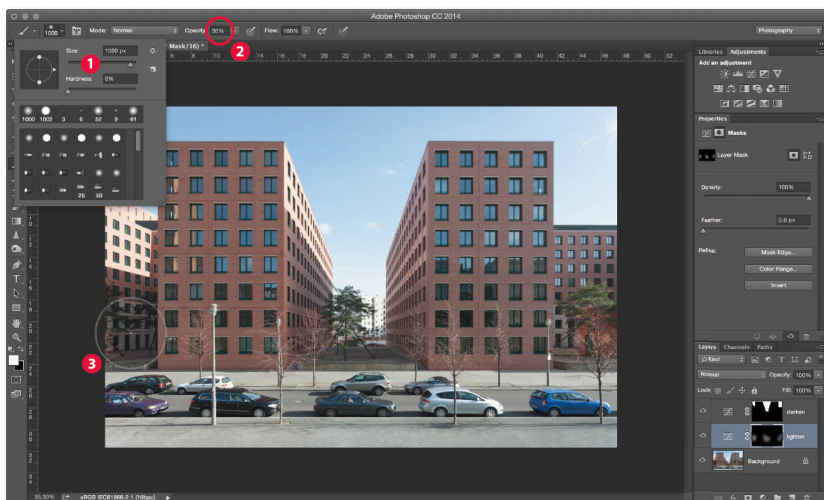


Fig. 315

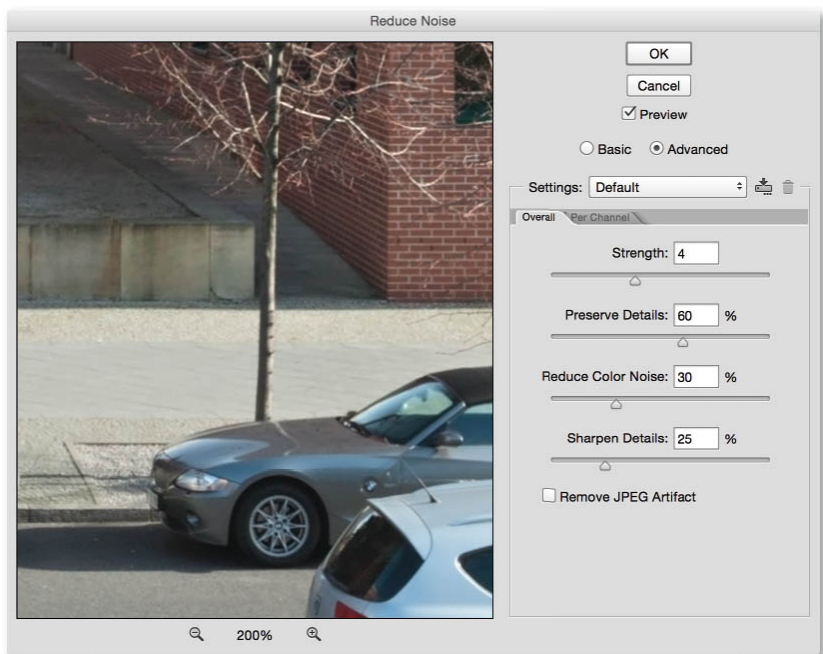


Fig. 316

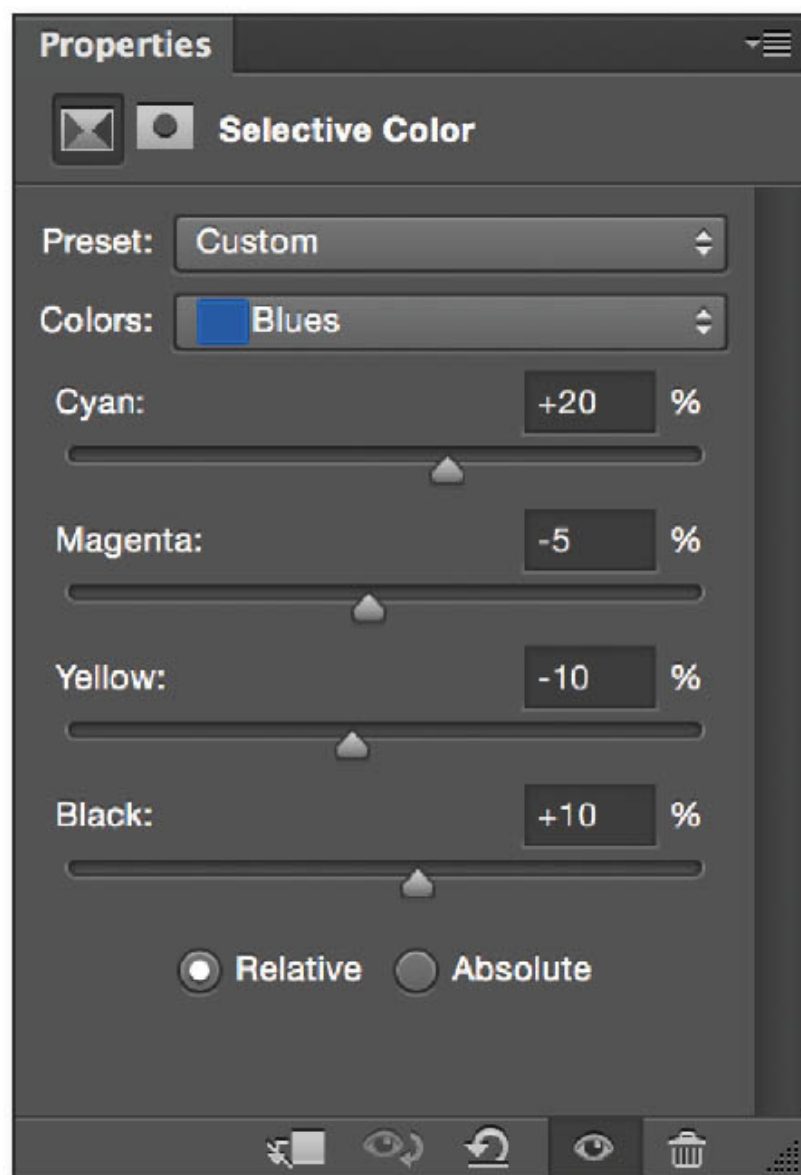


Fig. 317

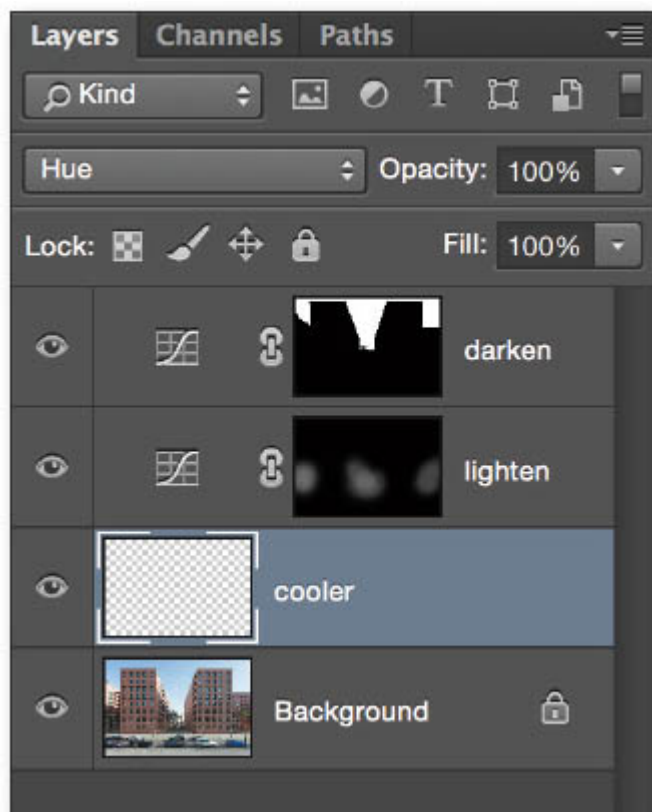


Fig. 318

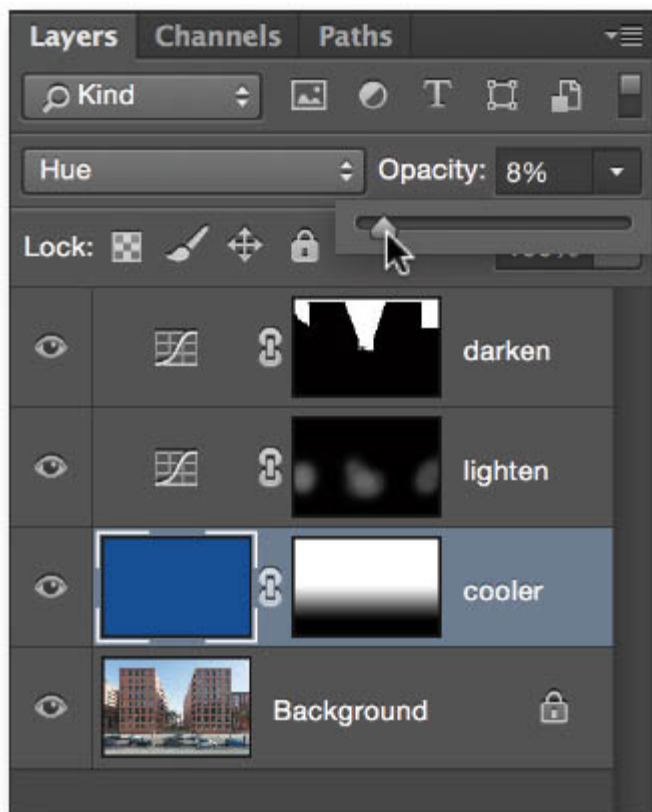


Fig. 319

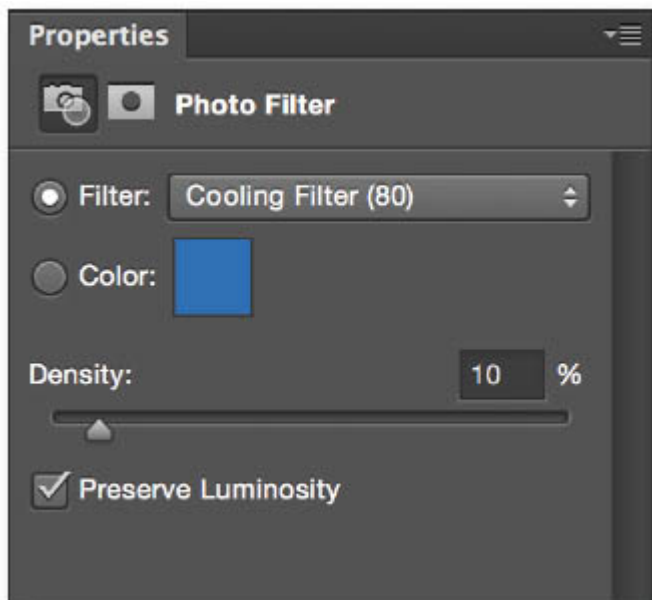


Fig. 320

6. **Saturation** can be increased or reduced in a similar way using the *Vibrance* dialog (also found in the *Adjustments* panel, [fig. 321](#)). The *Vibrance* slider adjusts saturation for less saturated colors to a greater degree than for colors that are already well saturated. The *Saturation* slider adjusts saturation irrespective of a color's current level of saturation.

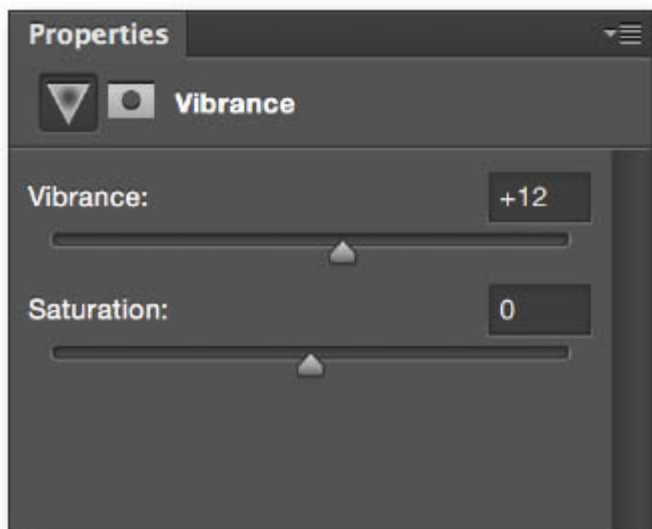


Fig. 321

7.I recommend that you use a slight S-curve created using the *Curves* dialog or the *Image > Auto Contrast* command to “stretch” the histogram for low-contrast images. This makes the darkest areas black and the brightest areas white. My sample image already covers a very broad tonal range, so I only had to slightly increase **local contrast** in order to improve the detail of the main façades in the shadows. To do this, duplicate the background layer (*Layer > Duplicate Layer*) and use the *Filter > Sharpen > Unsharp Mask* command with a high *Radius* value to increase edge and overall contrast. Set the *Amount* value to suit the image you are working on (fig. 322). The disadvantage of this technique is that it can produce unwanted “halo” effects at high-contrast edges (fig. 323), although these, too, can be removed using a layer mask and a black brush (fig. 324). Alternatively, you can load the selection already created for the *Darken* layer by holding down the Ctrl/Cmd key and clicking on the layer mask thumbnail (fig. 325). You can then apply it to the active layer mask on the *Local Contrast* layer (*Edit > Fill > Black*). After application, reduce the layer’s opacity to keep the effect subtle (fig. 326), as over-the-top effects quickly spoil the overall look of an image. Once you are done with these steps you can flatten your image to a single layer (*Layer > Flatten Image*).

8.**Sharpening** should always be the last step in the workflow. The *Filter*

> *Smart Sharpen* command produces great results if you use a medium *Amount*, set *Radius* to between *0.3* and *1.0*, choose a low value for *Reduce Noise*, and select the *Remove: Lens Blur* setting (fig. 327). If you use *Amount* and *Radius* values that are too high, ugly sharpening artifacts will pop up (fig. 328). The *Advanced* options can be used to apply the effect selectively to shadows and highlight areas as necessary. Alternative sharpening tools that produce very good results include Photoshop's own *Unsharp Mask* command and a range of high-quality third-party tools that include Nik Sharpener Pro, Topaz InFocus, or Focus Magic (fig. 329).

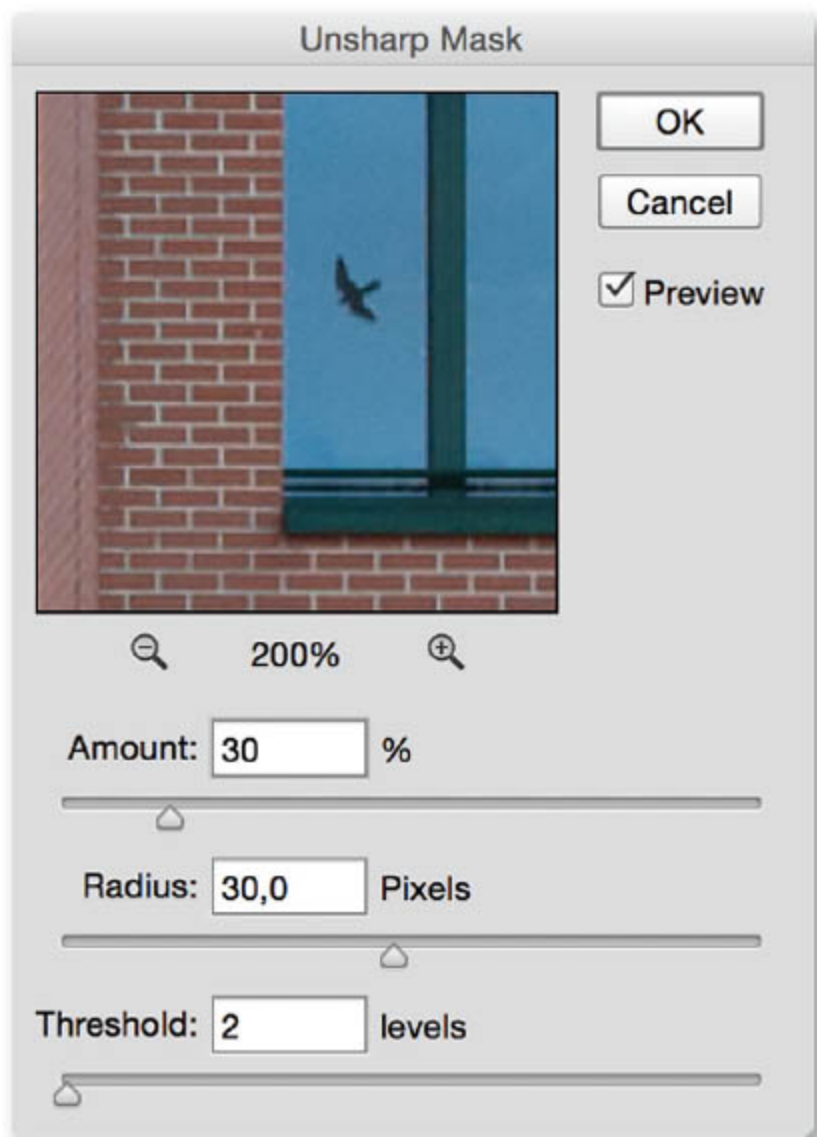


Fig. 322

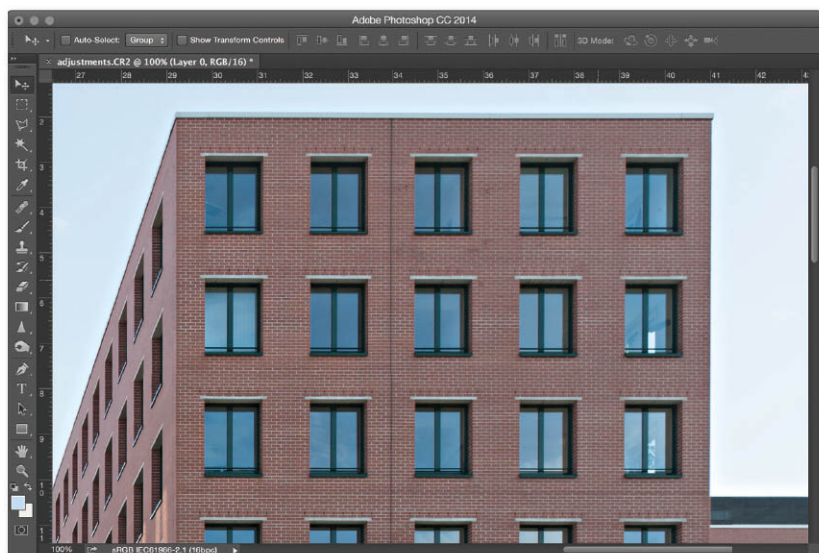


Fig. 323

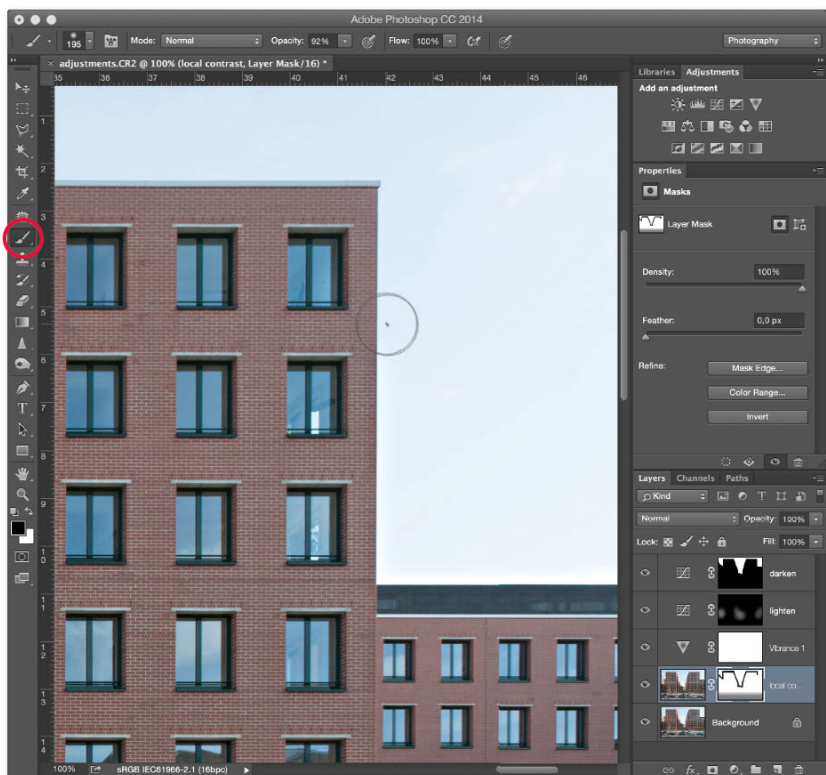


Fig. 324

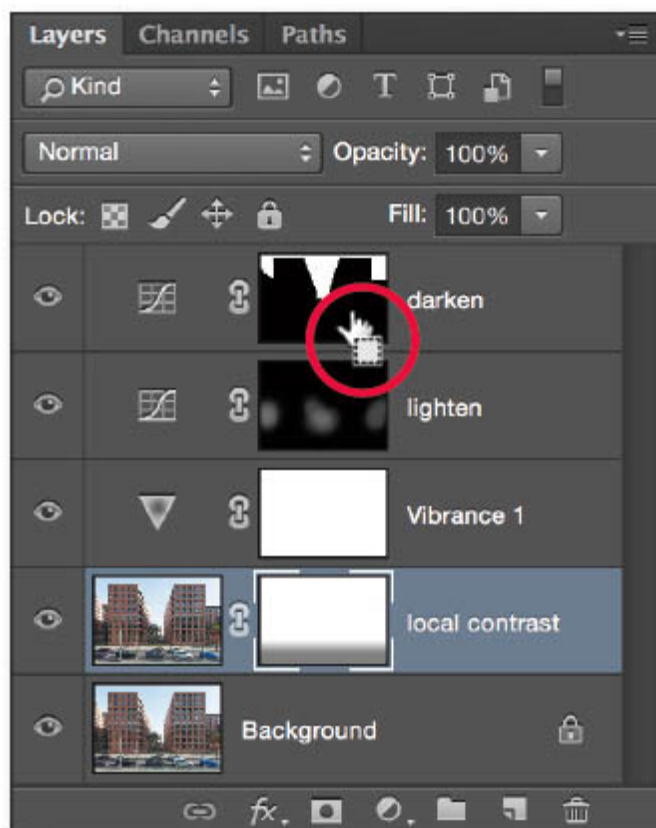


Fig. 325

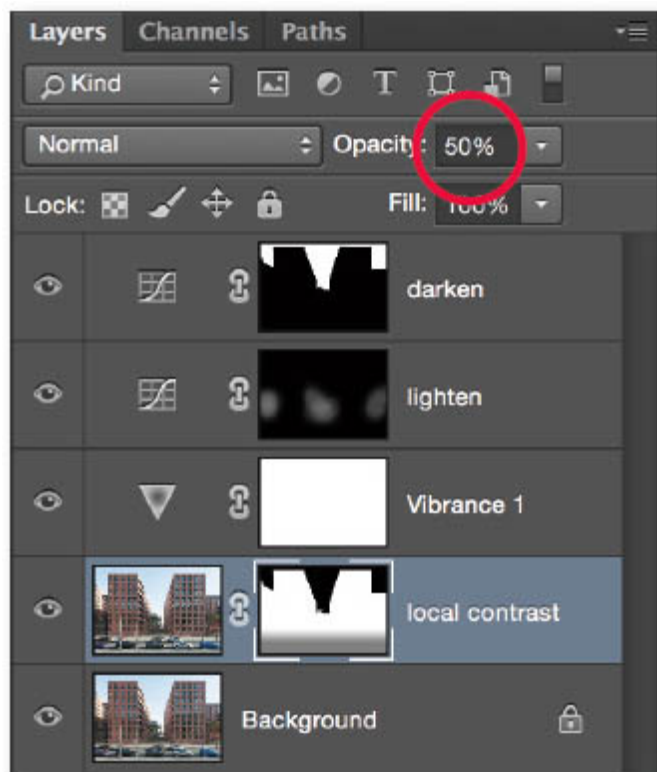


Fig. 326

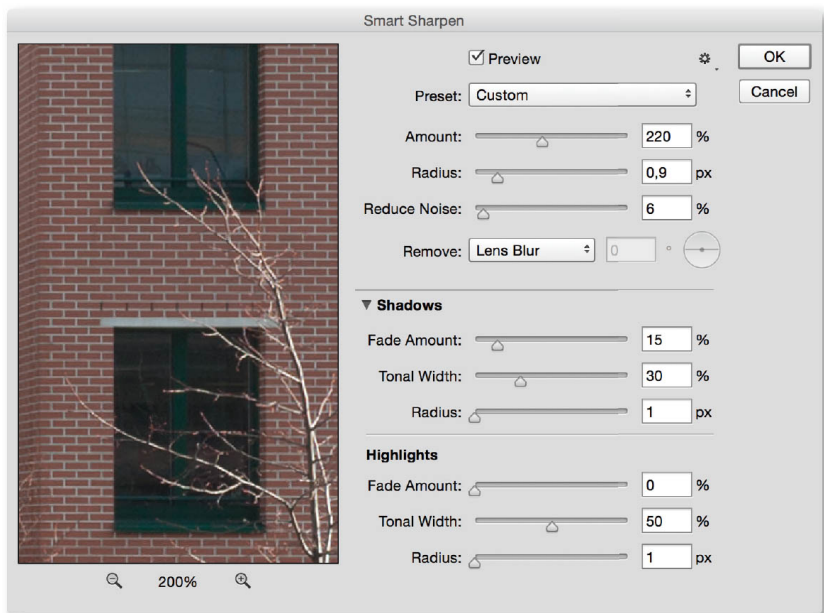


Fig. 327

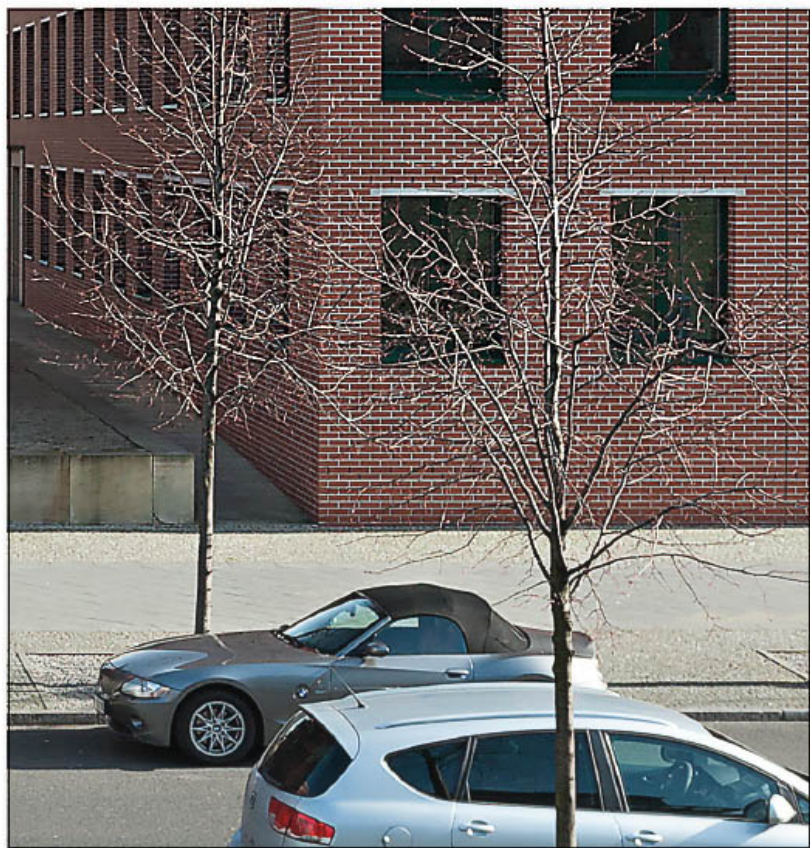


Fig. 328

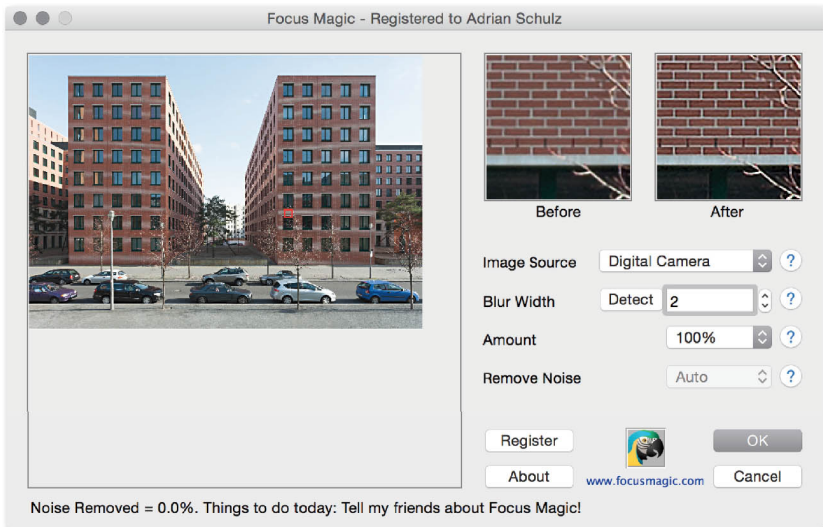


Fig. 329

9. Be sure to save your image before exiting Photoshop. The universal TIFF format or Photoshop's proprietary PSD format are best for **saving your image** losslessly and at high color depth, although both produce relatively large image files. TIFF images that contain large areas of uniform color can be effectively compressed using the (lossless) LZW or ZIP compression algorithms. If you are sure that you won't need to process your image any further, you can save disk space by converting it to 8 bpc before saving (*Image > Mode > 8 Bits/Channel*, fig. 330). The 8-bit JPEG format saves even more disk space. If you do decide to use JPEG, select the lowest possible compression level, as additional compression appreciably reduces image quality. And remember, a JPEG image is subject to further quality loss every time you open and re-save it. Use a *Quality* setting of *10* or *11* when exporting JPEGs. If you are saving images for presentation on the Internet or a mobile device, use the *Bicubic Sharper* interpolation method and a Web-compatible image size (*Image > Image Size*) such as 800 x 600 pixels (or double the size for retina displays). Then use the *Save for Web & Devices* command in the *File* menu, making sure that you select *JPEG* as you export format and *High* or *Very High* compression quality. This command automatically converts 16-bit images to 8-bit and enables you to optionally remove any remaining Exif data (page 229). If you

deactivate the *Embed Color Profile* option, which I would not recommend doing, the color profile will be deleted.

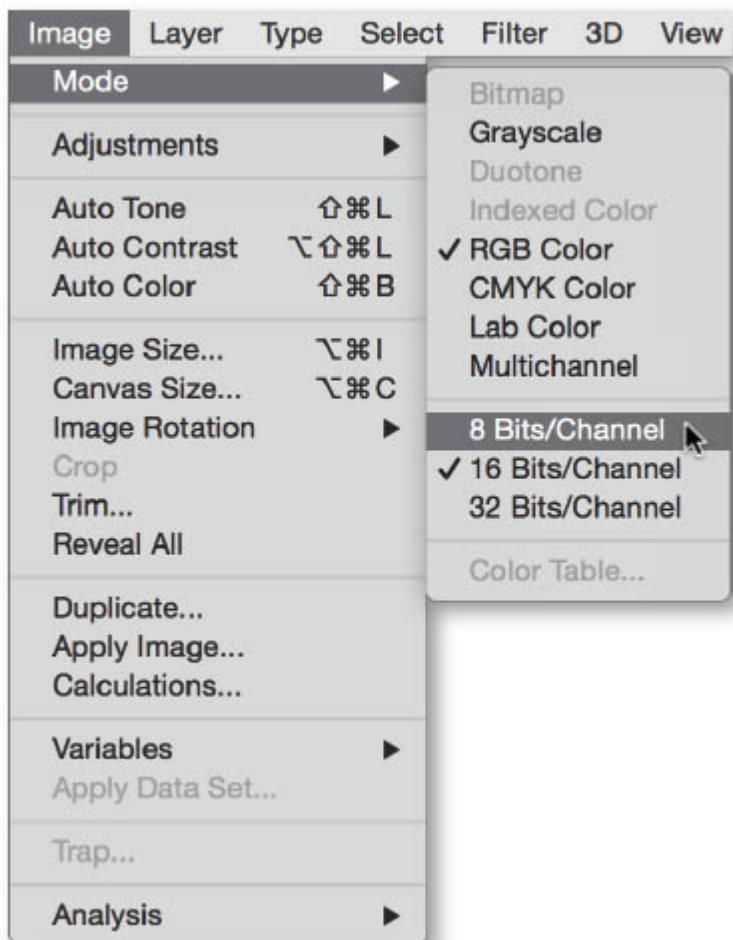


Fig. 330

Photoshop Image Adjustment Overview

- ▶ *Distortion correction*
- ▶ *Perspective correction*

- ▶ *Brightness and contrast adjustments*
- ▶ *Noise reduction*
- ▶ *Color corrections*
- ▶ *Contrast fine-tuning*
- ▶ *Sharpening*
- ▶ *Data storage*



Fig.331: The adjustments we performed using Photoshop have greatly improved the overall look and feel of our original JPEG image

4.3.2In-depth Processing: **Selective Adjustments to Contrast and Brightness**

Architectural photos often require selective brightening or darkening in specific image areas to counteract the effects of exposure errors or extreme subject contrast. The previous section (4.3.1) details color range and layer mask techniques for performing selective corrections. This section describes some alternative methods of achieving similar effects, including using the Photoshop *Shadows/Highlights* command, the use of so-called “contrast masks,” and the use of specialized plug-ins, such as LightMachine.

Workflow: Selective Contrast and Brightness Correction

1. Large portions of the façades in my sample image are too dark (fig. 332). The first option for correcting these is to use the Photoshop *Image > Adjustments > Shadows/Highlights* command. The default dialog shows just two sliders that allow you to adjust the *Amount* for *Shadows* or *Highlights*, while checking the *Show More Options* box gives you a much broader choice of options (fig. 333). To brighten dark image areas, use the *Amount*, *Tone*, and *Radius* settings in the *Shadows* section of the dialog window. The *Amount* setting regulates the strength of the effect, but take care not to set it too high or your image will take on an unnatural look. Low *Tone* settings cause the effect to be applied only to dark areas, while higher values affect lighter ones. Mid-range values usually produce good results. The *Radius* setting determines the size of the area around a shadow that will be affected. If you use a value that is too low, it can produce bright fringes, but if the value is too high, the effect will only be applied to large areas of uniform color. The dialog also provides *Color* and *Midtone* sliders in the *Adjustments* section of the dialog for color corrections and adjusting the midtone contrast in the areas you are currently correcting. Again, try not to set values that are too high. Leave the *Black Clip* and *White Clip* values unchanged.



Fig. 332

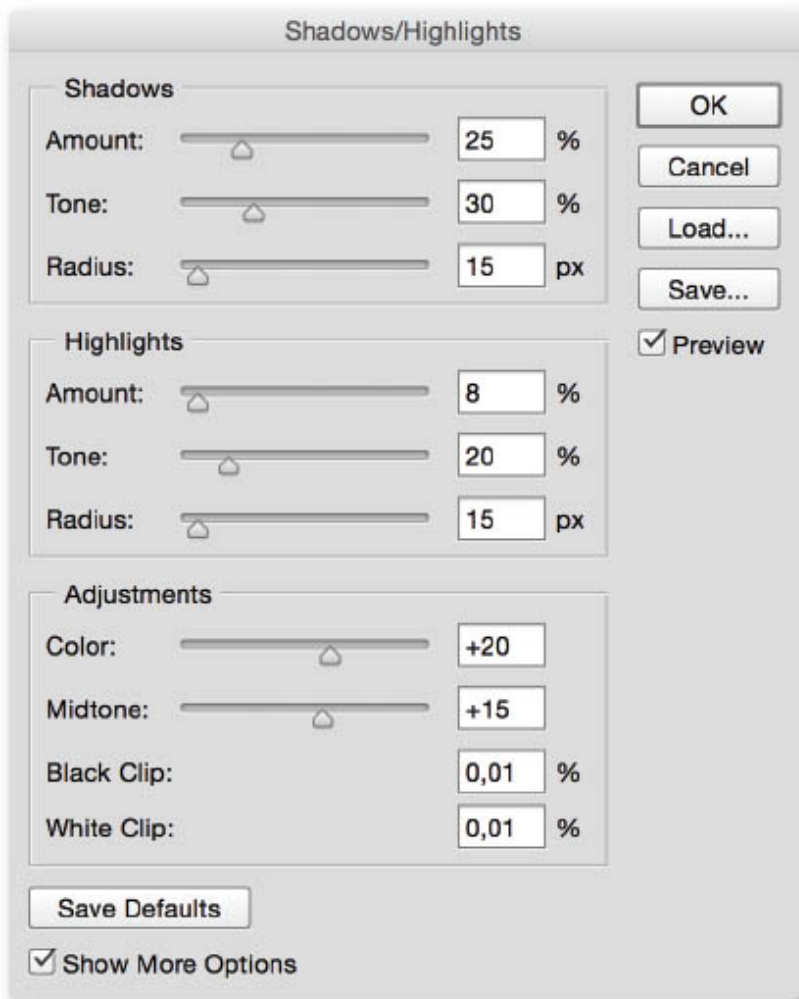


Fig. 333

- 2.A “contrast mask” is another effective way to brighten dark image areas. First, duplicate the background layer (*Layer > Duplicate Layer*), reduce saturation (*Image > Adjustments > Desaturate*), and convert the resulting image into a negative (*Image > Adjustments > Invert*, [fig. 334](#)). You can then apply the *Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur* filter using a Radius setting of between 5 and 15 pixels, according to the size of your image ([fig. 335](#)). Switch the blend mode to *Overlay* and reduce opacity to between 30 and 50% ([fig.](#)

336).

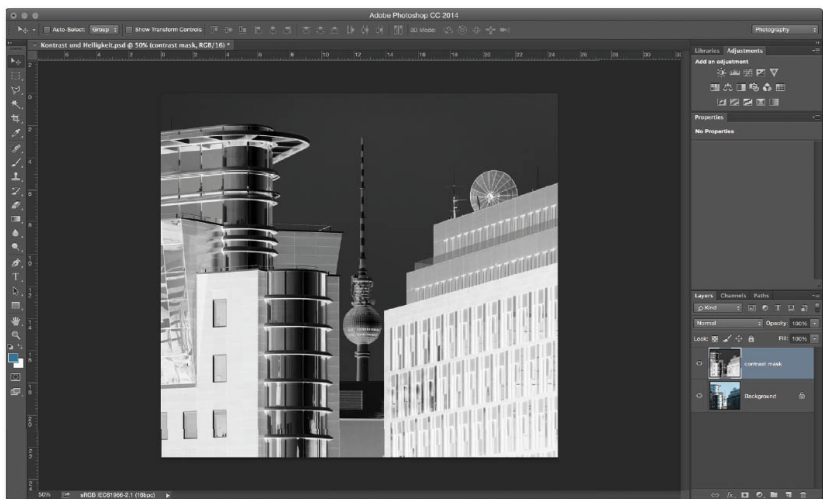


Fig. 334

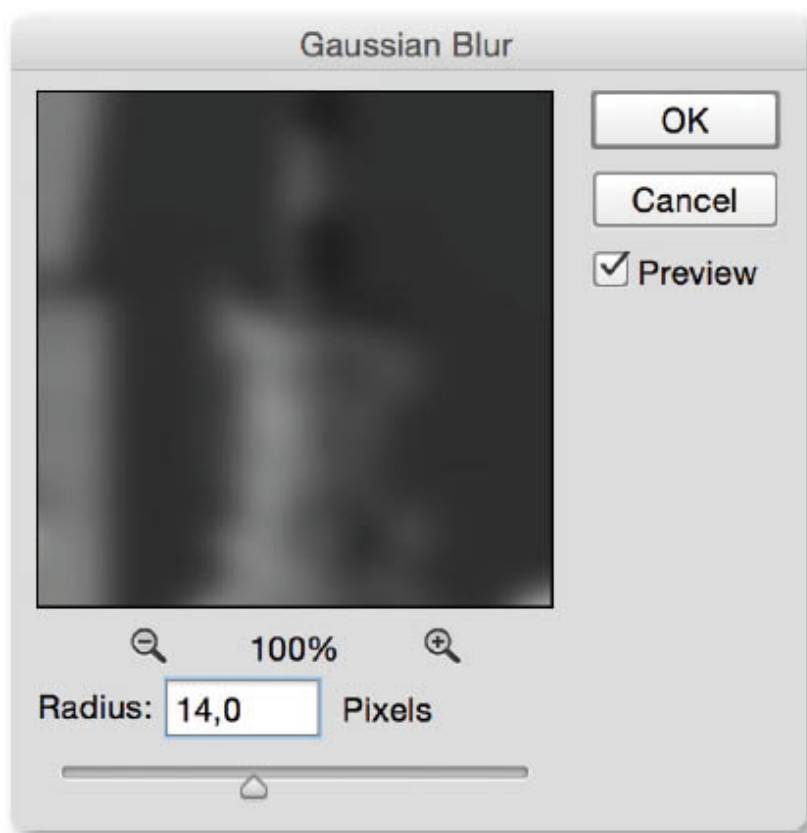


Fig. 335

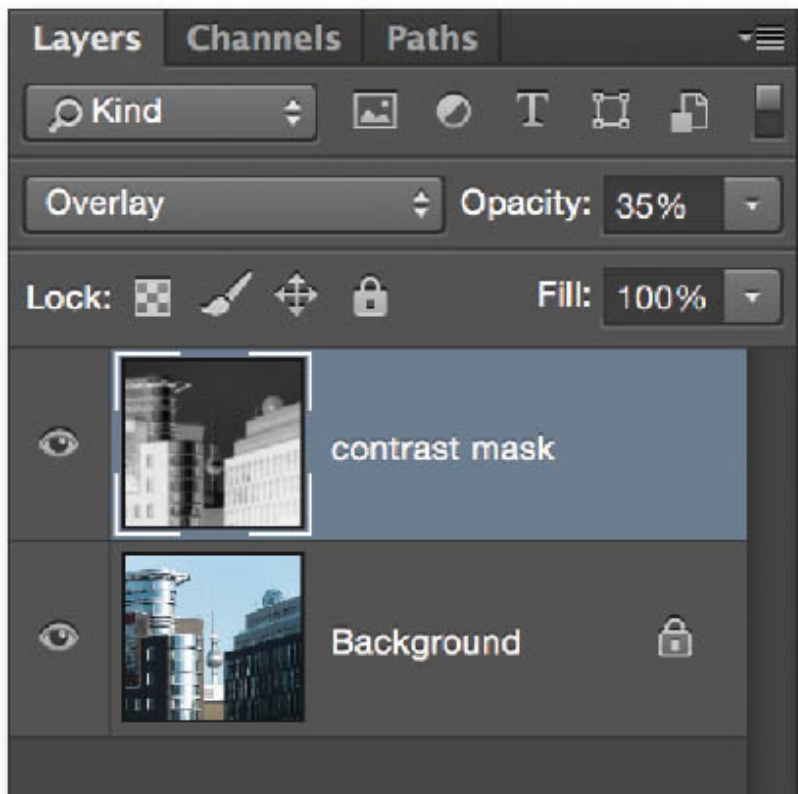


Fig. 336

3. Plug-ins like LightMachine (from The Plugin Site) work on a similar basis but are more precise and offer more individual options (fig. 337). LightMachine's *Shadows/Highlights Pro* mode allows you to selectively brighten or darken parts of your image, while the *Auto Mask* and *Fine-Tune* options are designed to help you eliminate fringing while preserving image contrast.

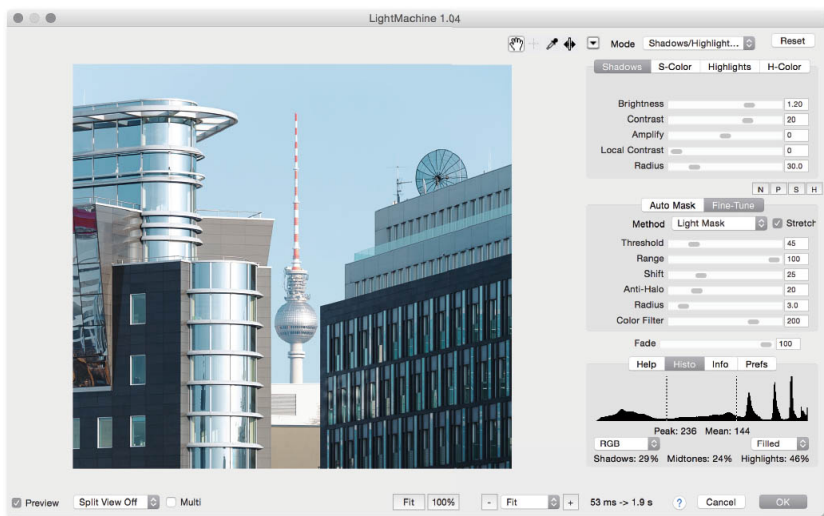


Fig. 337

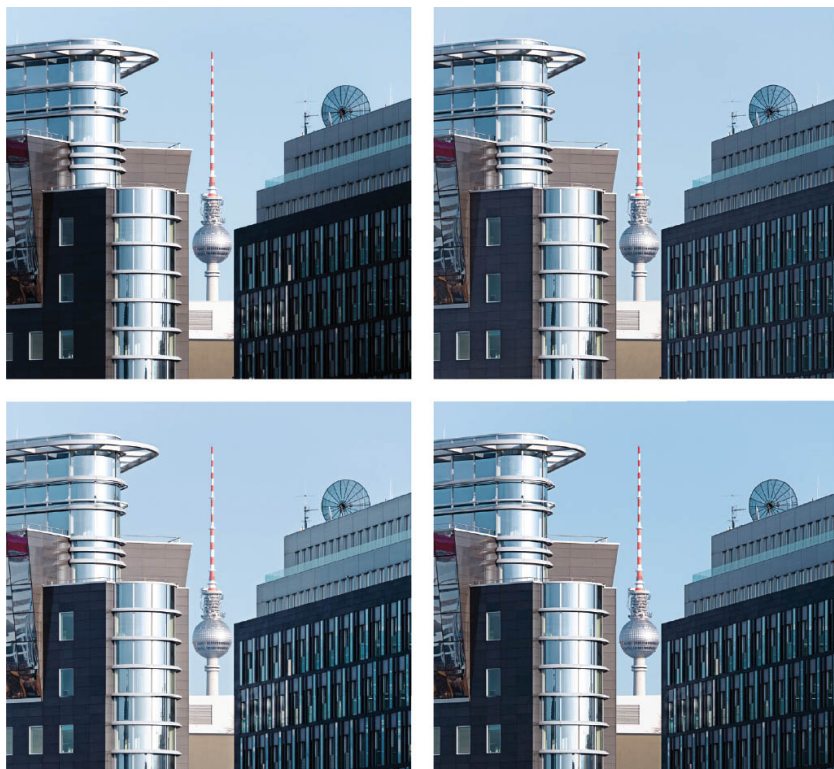
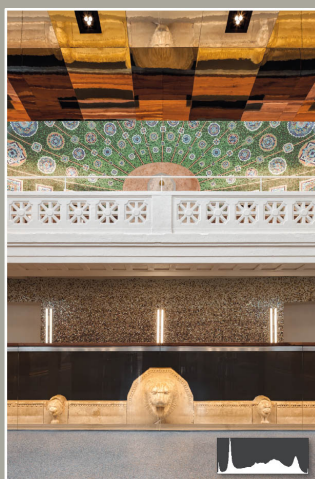
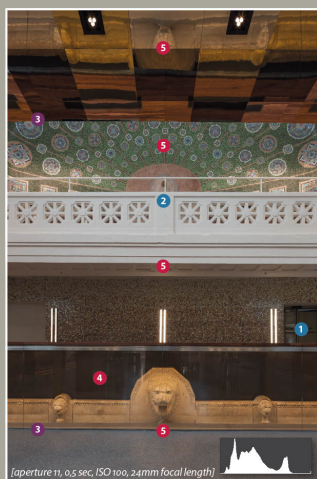


Fig. 338: Clockwise from top left: The unprocessed image, adjusted using the

Shadows/highlights tool, adjusted using a contrast mask, and adjusted using LightMachine

Before and After

*Nothing better conveys the potential benefits of digitally editing architectural photos than before-and-after comparisons. You'll find two such illustrations below, each consisting of one unaltered image (white balance was only set manually) and one image reflecting all the final edits. The interventions in these examples are not dramatic, but they improve the images noticeably. The types of edits are coded by color: **blue** indicates retouching edits; **purple**, perspective corrections; **red**, brightness and contrast changes; and **turquoise**, color manipulations.*



- 1** The door was retouched (by mirroring the left side of the image)
- 2** The vertical beam was shifted to restore symmetry
- 3** The visually dominating vertical and horizontal contours were precisely aligned
- 4** The midtones and highlights in the glass were darkened to reduce reflections

- 5 The brightness was corrected with a tone curve selectively applied to the most important layers of the image



- 1 Distracting objects such as light switches, signs, and smoke detectors were retouched
- 2 The visually dominating vertical contours were precisely aligned
- 3 Areas of the room were brightened to establish a consistent quality of light and to create spatial depth
- 4 The false blue cast created by a light directly above the camera was desaturated

4.4Panoramas

Merging multiple source images to form a panorama is not a regular feature of an architectural photographer's work, but some situations nevertheless make it a practical alternative shooting method. Panoramas can take on many forms, depending on the original concept for the image and the type and quality of your source images. Spherical panoramas are suitable for display in an interactive context—for example, for displaying interiors on a computer. Cylindrical panoramas can be used to capture extremely wide angles of view and are thus suitable for portraying the complex architectural relationships that exist between multiple buildings on a single site. Flat (planar) panoramas and shift panoramas shot using tilt/shift lenses or shift adapters adhere to the rules of central projection and thus display buildings in a more familiar way. The following sections describe how to create planar panoramas for architectural use.

4.4.1 Creating a Planar Panorama

My first example shows three images of the German Historical Museum in Berlin, shot handheld in portrait format without the use of any special accessories (fig. 339). There are a great many specialized “stitching” programs available for constructing panoramas, and the following sections illustrate the process using both the free, platform-independent Hugin package and Photoshop.

Workflow: Creating a Planar Panorama Using Hugin

1. Before you import your source images into Hugin, you should perform a RAW conversion that includes corrections for chromatic aberrations and vignetting artifacts, as these types of errors cannot be corrected later in the process. It is also advisable to correct any lens errors using a plug-in such as PTLens or LensFix before stitching; then you will no longer have to correct distortion using Hugin. Ideally, you should save your prepared source images in TIFF format rather than JPEG.
2. There are a few changes you should make to Hugin's *Preferences* when you use the program for the first time. Check the *Enable rotation search* option in the *Control Points Editor* tab (fig. 340) and activate the *cpfind + celeste (slower, but no cps on clouds)* option as

the default in the *Control Point Detectors* tab (fig. 341). You'll get better results if you check the *Use alternative Enblend program* option in the *Programs* tab (Enblend is included with the download) and select the path to the location where Enblend is stored (fig. 342).



Fig. 339

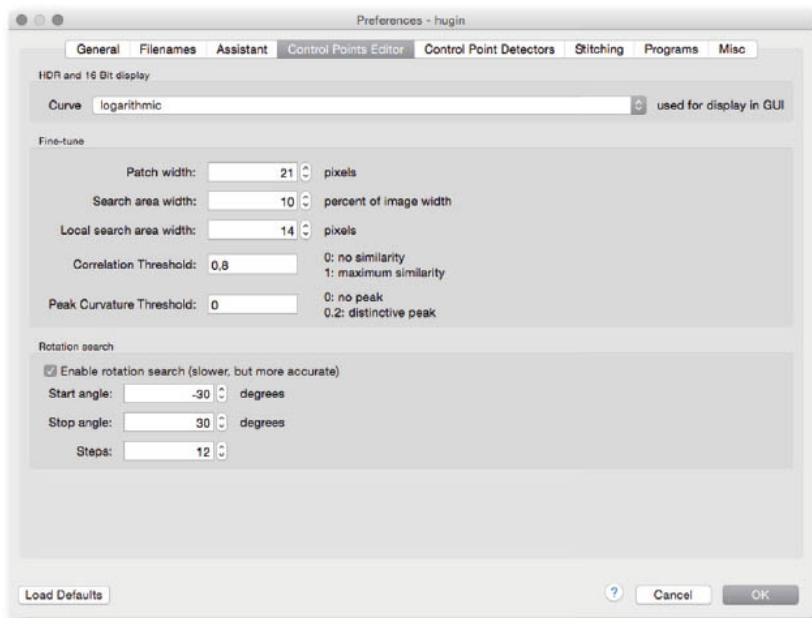


Fig. 340

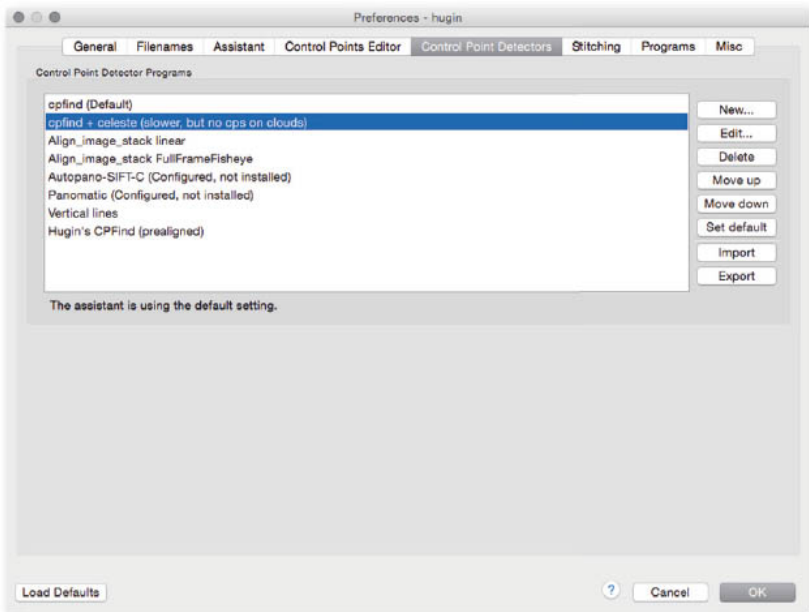


Fig. 341

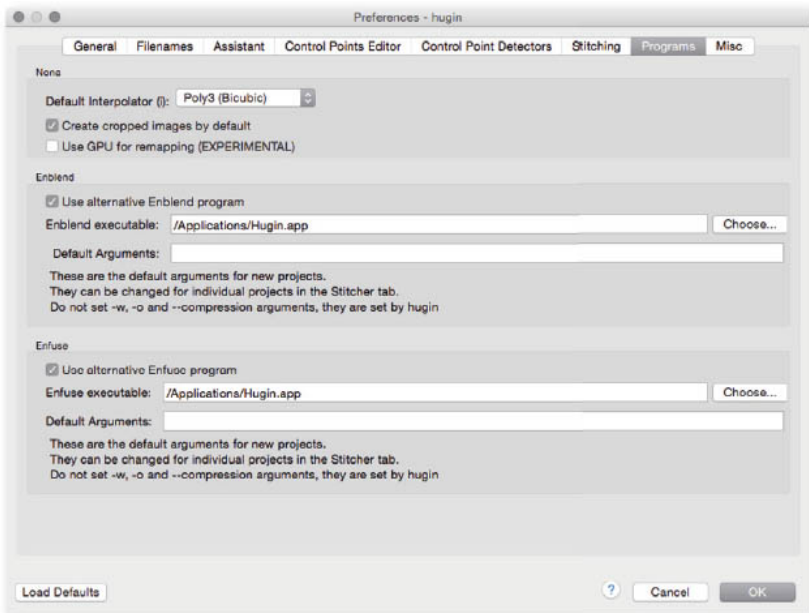


Fig. 342

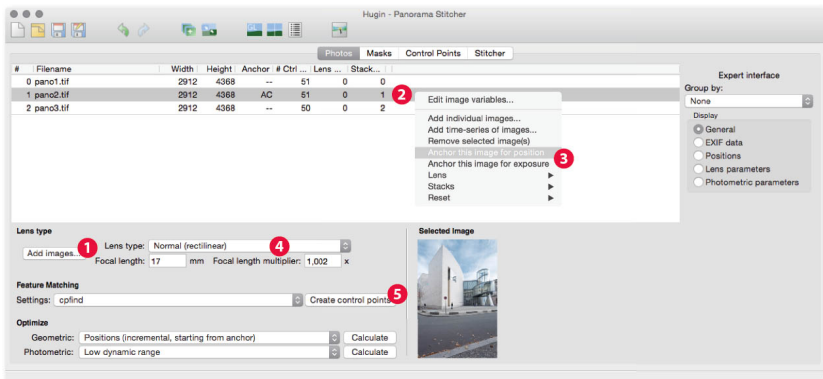


Fig. 343

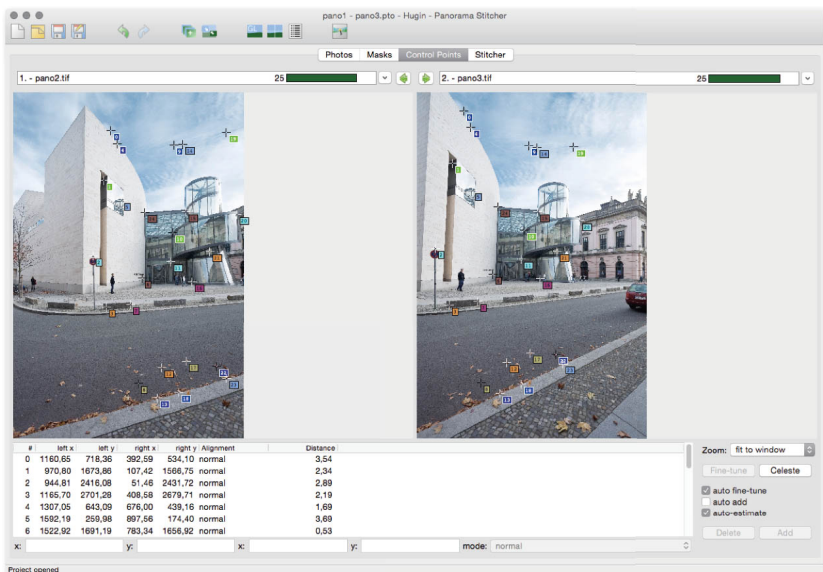


Fig. 344

3. Don't use the Assistant, but instead switch to the *Expert* window (*Interface > Expert*, fig. 343). I can now load my three source images using the *Add images* button ①. The next step is to select the center image ② and right click to activate the *position* and *exposure* anchor buttons ③. For *Lens type*, select *Normal (rectilinear)* ④. You can also manually input the focal length and crop factor as needed, which may be the case if your camera doesn't

record Exif data with the images or if you use an adapted manual lens to shoot your images. I now use the *Create control points* button to automatically detect overlaps between the images **5**.

4. I made no changes to the *Masks* settings in my sample workflow.

5. The settings in the *Control Points* tab are an important factor in the production of high-quality results. For my sample images, the program detected a large number of corresponding points distributed throughout the frame (fig. 344), but to ensure really accurate stitching, you should nevertheless set a few manual control points along the major edges of your subject. To do this, click on a relevant point in the left-hand image. This will then be magnified in the preview window (fig. 345). This makes it simple to select a distinctive detail—in my case, an edge of the building's façade. The software usually finds the corresponding point in the right-hand image, too (fig. 346), although a little manual tweaking is sometimes necessary. Clicking *Add* confirms the new control point and adds it to the list. This procedure can be repeated as often as necessary.

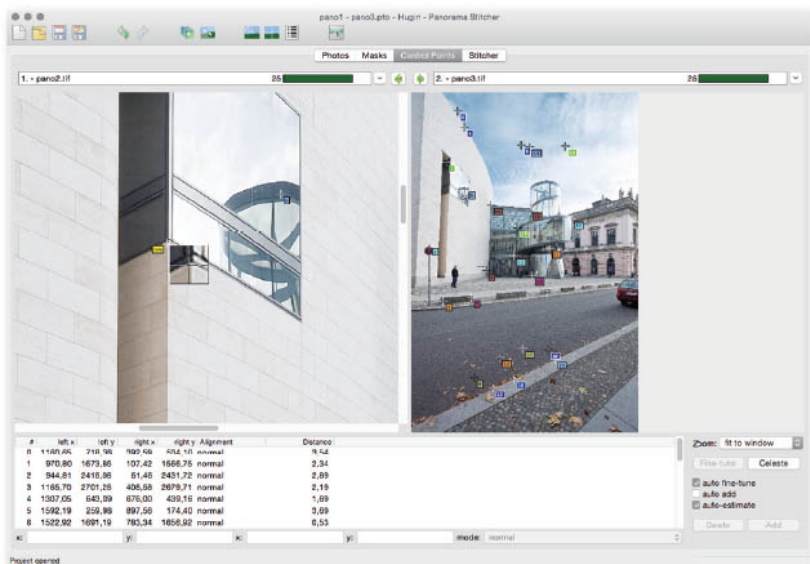


Fig. 345

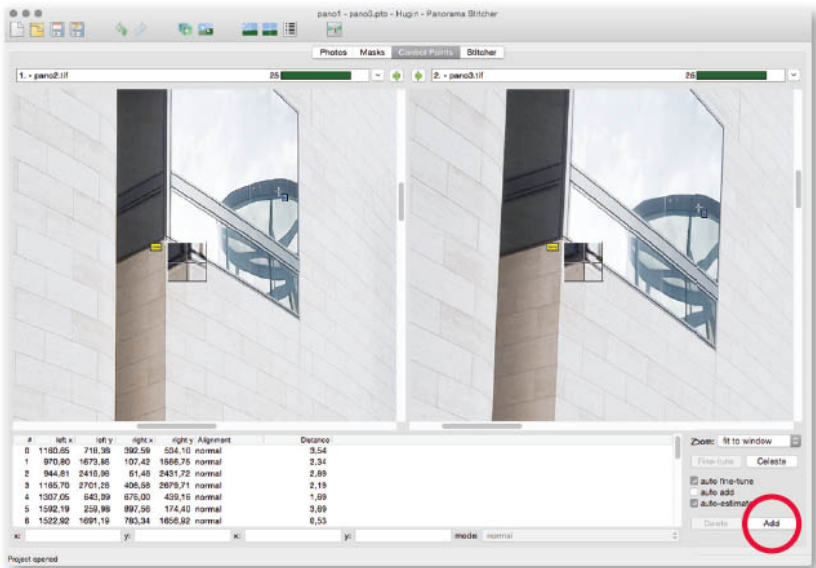


Fig. 346

6. Pressing the *Re-optimize* button (fig. 347) prompts the software to align the source images with respect to all of the control points. The results were good for my example image, especially when you consider that my sequence was spontaneous and was shot and panned handheld, and has an average control point distance of just 3.846632 pixels (fig. 348).



Fig. 347

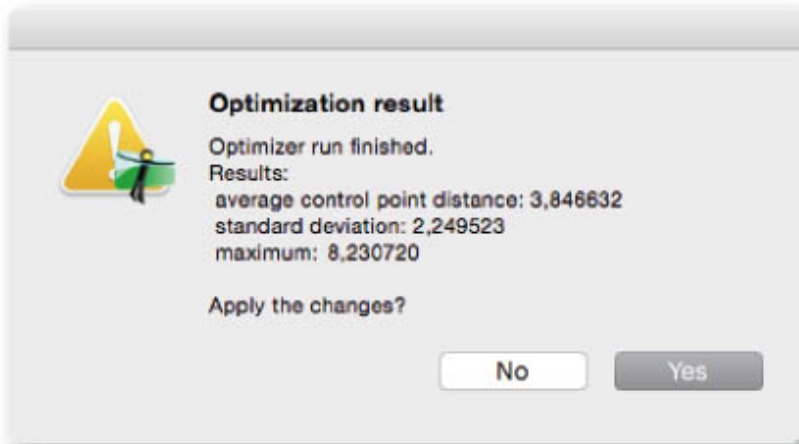


Fig. 348

7. At this stage, it's worth opening the preview window (*View > Preview window*, fig. 349). This allows you to fine-tune and align your panorama as well as selecting the projection type. To create a planar panorama, select *Rectilinear* ①. If the preview image is too small, click *Fit* followed by *Update* ②, or use the sliders to create a custom fit ③. The *Straighten* command ④ aligns your panorama fully automatically, although adjusting it manually usually leads to more accurate results. For a manual adjustment, click on a point that corresponds to the center of the panorama at camera level ⑤. The program automatically eliminated the converging lines in my example. The preview window can now be closed.

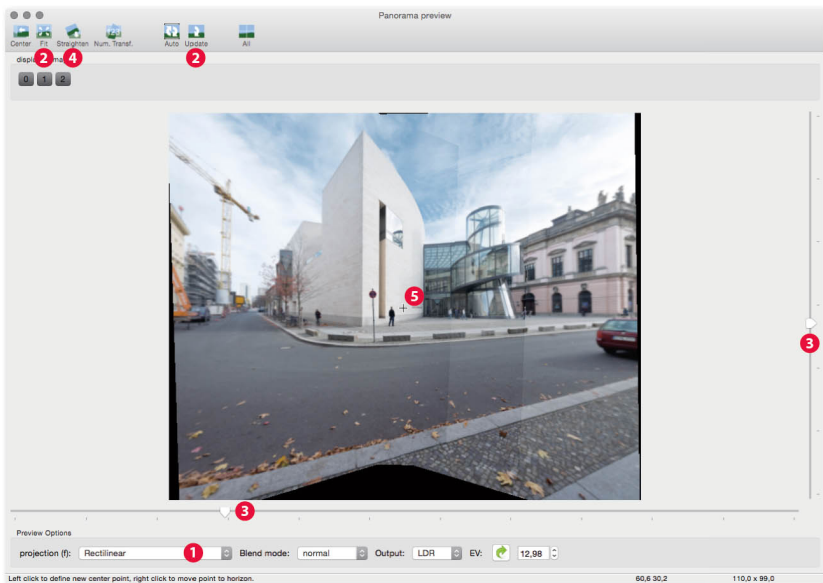


Fig. 349

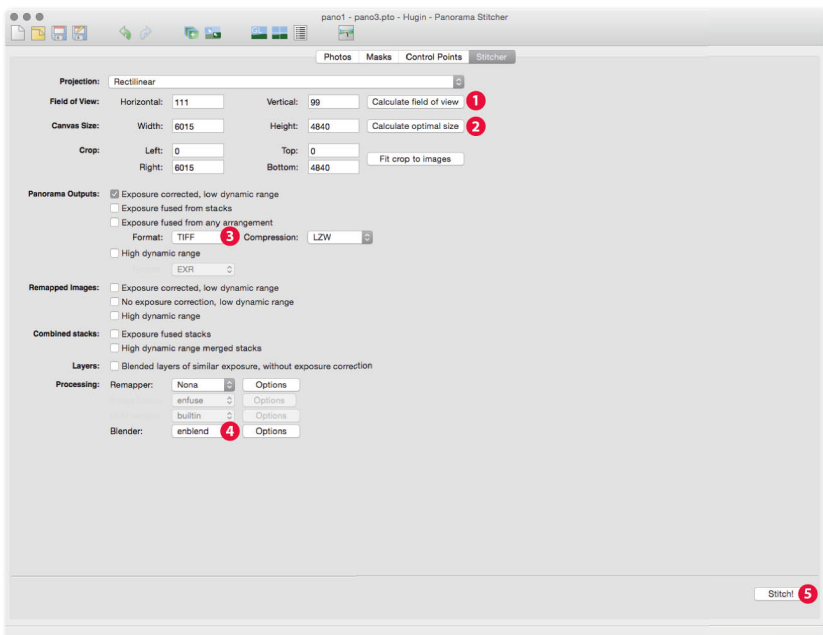


Fig. 350

8. The final *Stitcher* tab (fig. 350) is where you activate the *Calculate field of view* ①, *Calculate optimal size* ②, and *Panorama Outputs* options. Select *Exposure corrected*, *low dynamic range* and select the *TIFF* file format ③ to retain the maximum possible image quality for subsequent processing. Make sure that you select the *Enblend Processing* option ④. All that now remains is to click *Stitch!* and select a filename and the folder in which you want to save your panorama ⑤. The program now stitches your source images together at full resolution.
9. Use your favorite image-processing program to crop the finished panorama and perform any necessary fine-tuning steps.

Workflow: Creating a Planar Panorama Using Photoshop

1. Photoshop's own panorama creation tool is less complex than Hugin, but offers fewer options in the course of the workflow. Open the tool using the *File > Automate > Photomerge* command. The resulting dialog asks you to select your source images and, in contrast to many other panorama programs, also allows you to select RAW image files. Again, if you want to stitch RAW images to make a panorama, perform any vignetting and chromatic aberration correction using a RAW converter first. If you are using Adobe Camera Raw, all you have to do is click *Done*, and all changes you have made will then be incorporated in the subsequent panorama workflow. Once you have loaded your source images (mine are TIFF files) and selected the *Perspective* option in the *Layout* section, click *OK* to start the automatic panorama creation process (fig. 351).

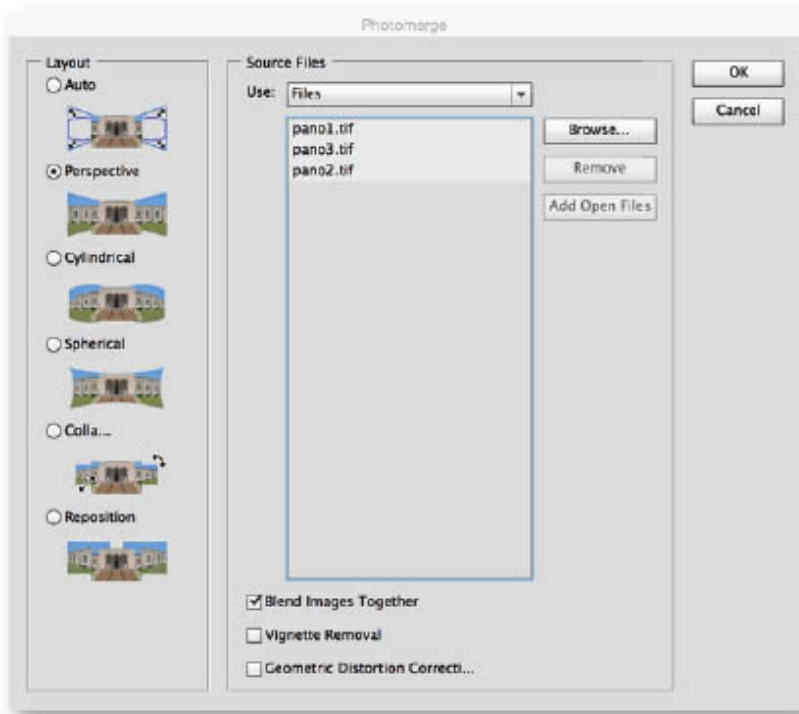


Fig. 351

2. Although Photoshop displays the finished panorama as a single image, the individual source images are still stored on separate layers, making it simple to manually adjust the overlaps if necessary (fig. 352). If you are stitching three or more source images and your finished panorama is obviously distorted toward one end, make sure that the center image is the last in the list when selecting your images (fig. 353).
3. Use the *Distort* and *Perspective* options for the *Edit > Transform* command to remove any converging lines (fig. 354). Turning on the grid or rulers from the *View* menu helps you align your image.
4. Crop your results using the *Crop* tool (fig. 355) and fine-tune brightness, contrast, color, and sharpness as necessary (fig. 143 shows my finished panorama).

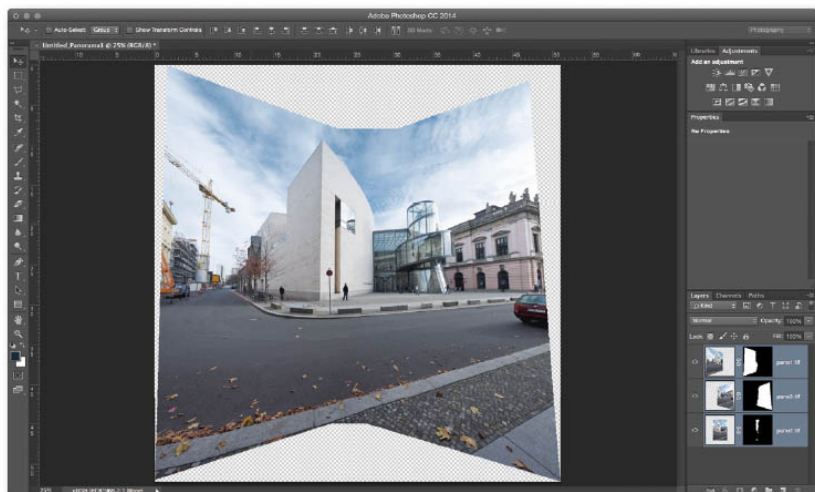


Fig. 352

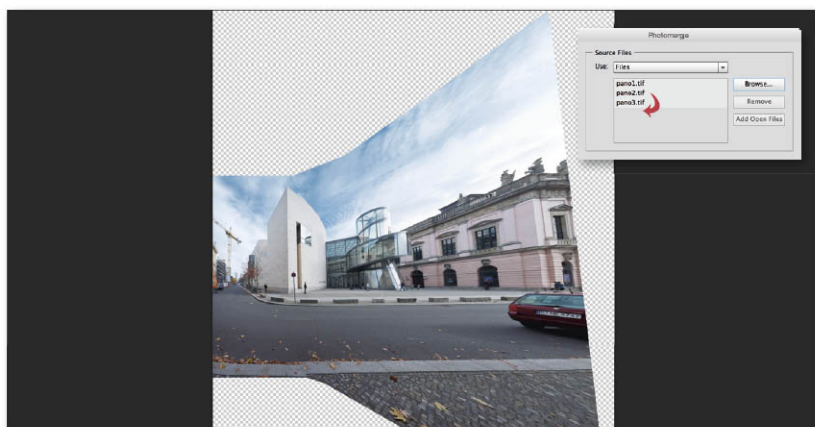


Fig. 353

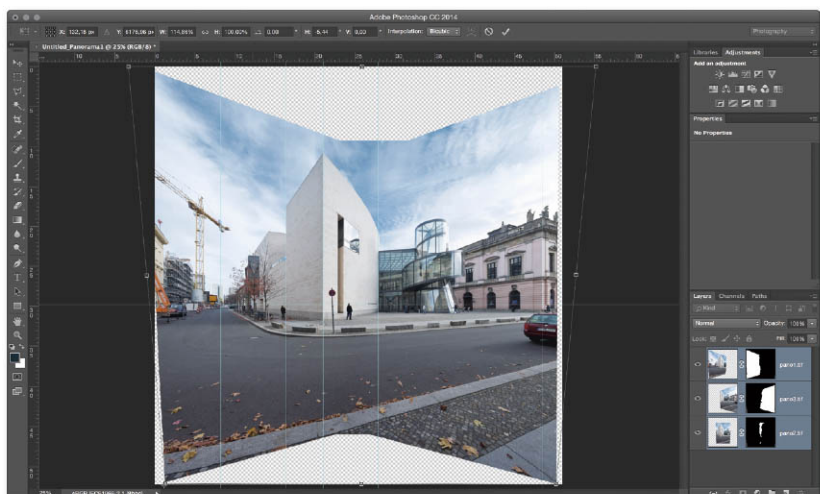


Fig. 354

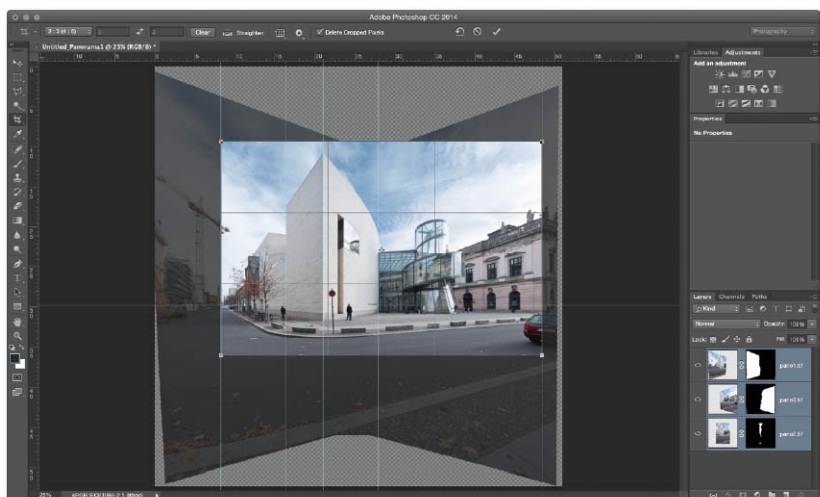


Fig. 355

4.4.2 Shift Panoramas

Panorama source images that are shot using shift lenses have a common line of vision. With regular shift lenses, the slightly shifted light path produces a very slight difference in perspective, which, in many cases, is

negligible at the kinds of subject distances that are common in architectural photos. Some shift adapters are constructed in such a way that the adapter itself is attached to the tripod ([fig. 145](#)), making it possible to produce panorama source images with perfectly superimposed overlaps.

Workflow: Creating a Shift Panorama Using Photoshop

1. My sample source images were shot in portrait format using a 24mm shift lens. The lens was shifted to “11 o’clock” in the first image and was then rotated through 60 degrees to “one o’clock” for the second. The result is two images with a large overlap. [Fig. 356](#) shows my identically converted source images opened in Photoshop. I then used the *Move* tool to position the left-hand image over the right-hand one ([fig. 357](#)), which merges the two source images together. I now close the left-hand image and continue to work on the combined right-hand one.



Fig. 356

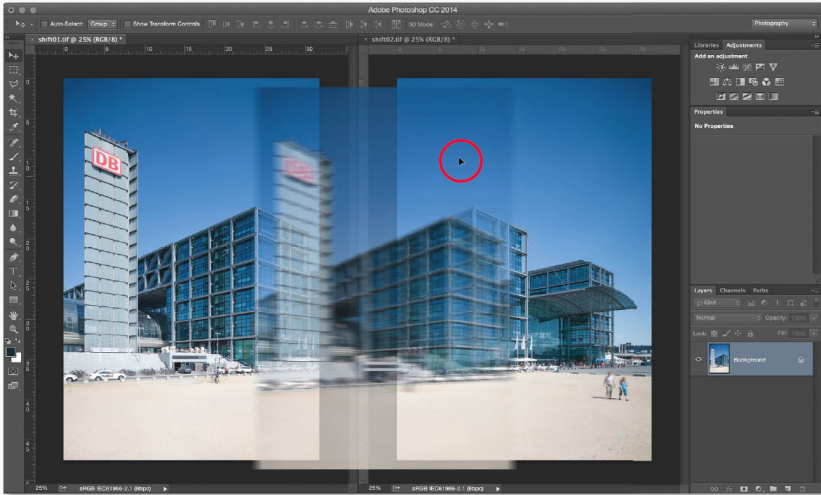


Fig. 357

2. To **automatically** align the two layers, select both while pressing the *Shift* key (fig. 358) and apply the *Auto-Align Layers* command from the *Edit* menu (fig. 359). Select the *Perspective* option in the dialog that follows and click *OK* (fig. 360). Photoshop then aligns the layers and adjusts the size of the canvas appropriately. You can align images **manually** if you want, although this does involve a lot more effort. First, you have to extend the canvas to the right using the *Layer > New > Layer from Background* command, or by double clicking the *Background* layer in the Layers panel. You then have to use the *Image > Canvas Size* command (with the *Relative* option deactivated) to select appropriate *Width* and *Height* values. Activate the right-hand center square as your *Anchor* (fig. 361) to ensure that the canvas is extended to the left and click *OK*. Select a 100% view and reduce opacity for the upper layer to 50% and use the *Move* tool to fine-tune the alignment—the reduced opacity makes it simple to superimpose details using the arrow keys (fig. 362).

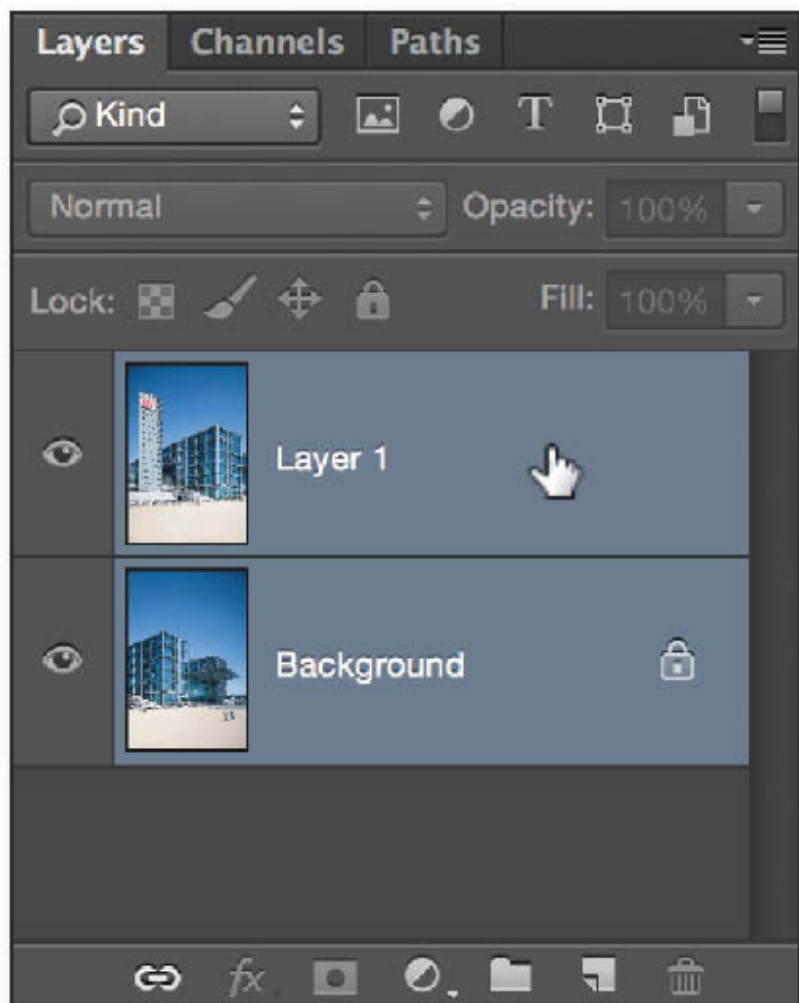


Fig. 358

Edit	Image	Layer	Type	Select
Undo Move				⌘ Z
Step Forward				⇧ ⌘ Z
Step Backward				⇧ ⌘ Z
Fade...				⇧ ⌘ F
Cut				⌘ X
Copy				⌘ C
Copy Merged				⇧ ⌘ C
Paste				⌘ V
Paste Special				▶
Clear				
Check Spelling...				
Find and Replace Text...				
Fill...				⇧ F5
Stroke...				
Content-Aware Scale				⇧ ⌘ C
Puppet Warp				
Perspective Warp				
Free Transform				⌘ T
Transform				▶
Auto-Align Layers...				
Auto-Blend Layers...				
Define Brush Preset...				
Define Pattern...				
Define Custom Shape...				
Purge				▶
Adobe PDF Presets...				
Presets				▶
Remote Connections...				
Color Settings...				⇧ ⌘ K
Assign Profile...				
Convert to Profile...				
Keyboard Shortcuts...				⇧ ⌘ K
Menus...				⇧ ⌘ M
Diktat starten				fn fn

Fig. 359

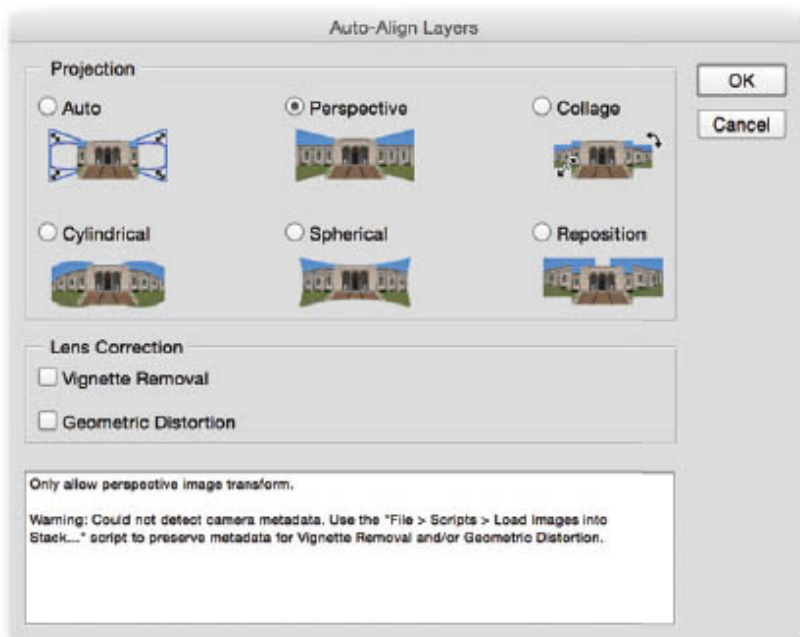


Fig. 360

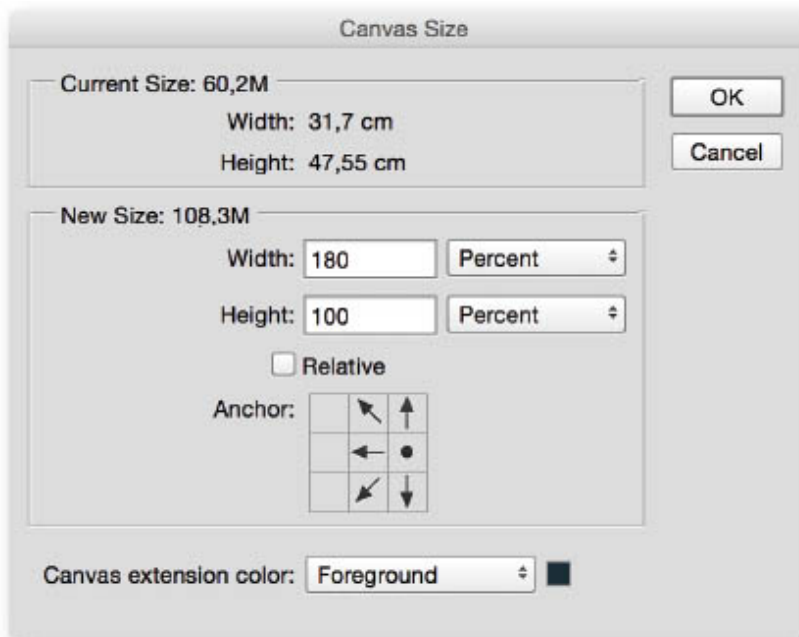


Fig. 361

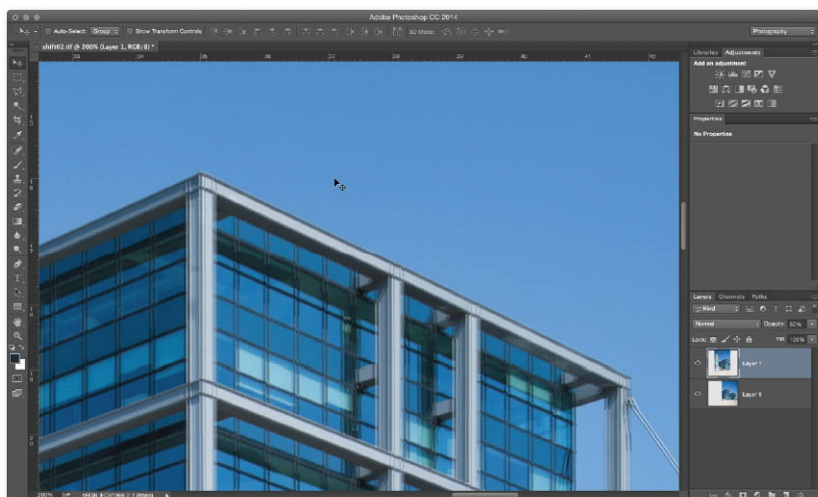


Fig. 362

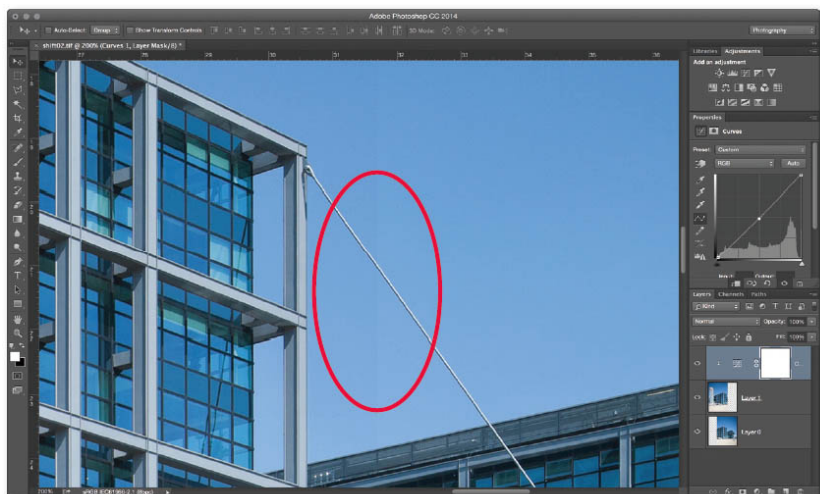


Fig. 363

3.A closer look at the automatically aligned image will reveal differences in brightness where the two source images overlap (fig. 363). Because lighting conditions are constantly in flux, these differences sometimes arise between the source images of shift panoramas (even when identical shooting settings are used). Even a tiny pause between photos is enough time for a hazy cloud to change the quality of the sunlight. The small movements of the optical axis during the shift process may also be enough for the mirror box to cast a slight shadow on one side of the image, or for bright reflections or stray light to reduce the image's overall contrast. To **automatically** correct this type of error, use the *Auto-Blend Layers* command from the *Edit* menu. Select the *Panorama* option in the following dialog and click *OK*. This blends the two source images seamlessly and creates manually adjustable layer masks for each (fig. 364). You can now use the *Crop* tool to iron out any remaining inconsistencies in the overlaps (fig. 365). You can also perform the same procedure **manually**. This involves manually creating a soft overlap to coincide with details within the source images and disguise any mismatch caused by shifting the lens. Using selected image details for the overlap makes it much easier to hide than using an obvious straight edge. I created my overlap using a layer mask and the *Magnetic Lasso* tool (though the *Polygon Lasso* tool could be used as well) to make a selection that automatically adheres to the

outline of the selected detail (fig. 366). The selection can then be fine-tuned using the *Rectangular Marquee* tool (with the shift key pressed) until the part of the upper layer that I wish to keep is precisely outlined (fig. 367). Clicking the *Add Layer Mask* button (fig. 368) produces a subtle overlap that follows the textures within the image. The *Dodge* and *Burn* tools can then be used to correct any remaining differences in brightness between neighboring image areas. Select a large, soft brush tip and a low *Exposure* value. The *Range* setting you use will depend on the overall brightness of the areas you are correcting (fig. 369). It also helps to blur large areas of uniform color in the layer mask (such as the sky) using a large, soft brush tip and a very low *Hardness* value (fig. 370). Setting a *Feather* value of between 5 and 15 pixels is a final touch that helps to make the overlap completely invisible.

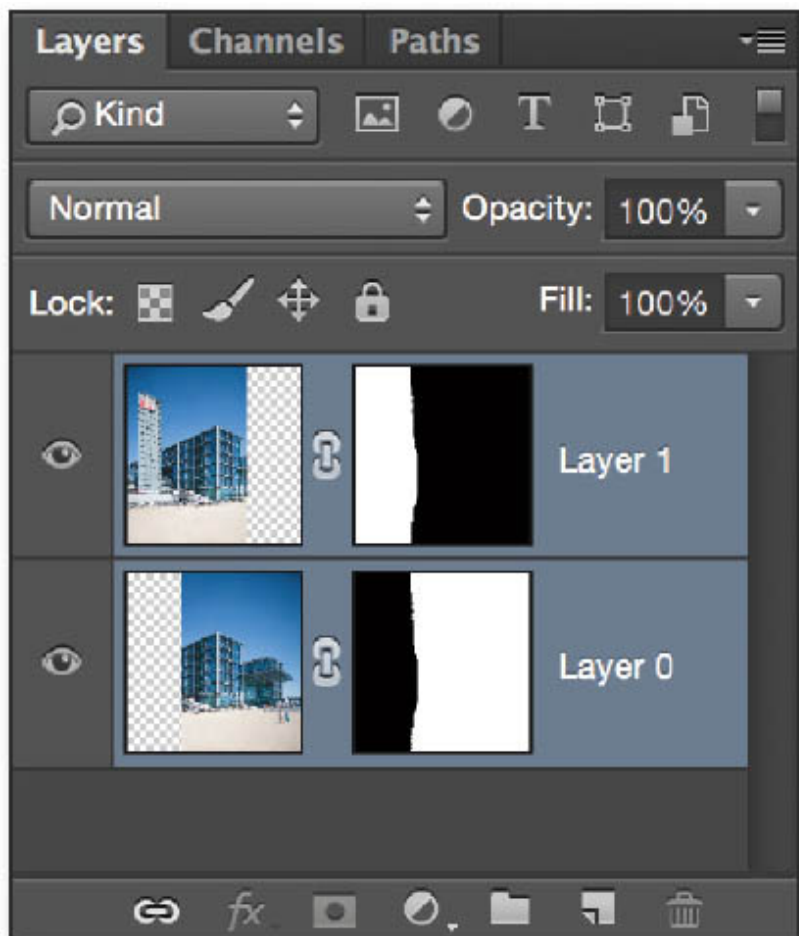


Fig. 364

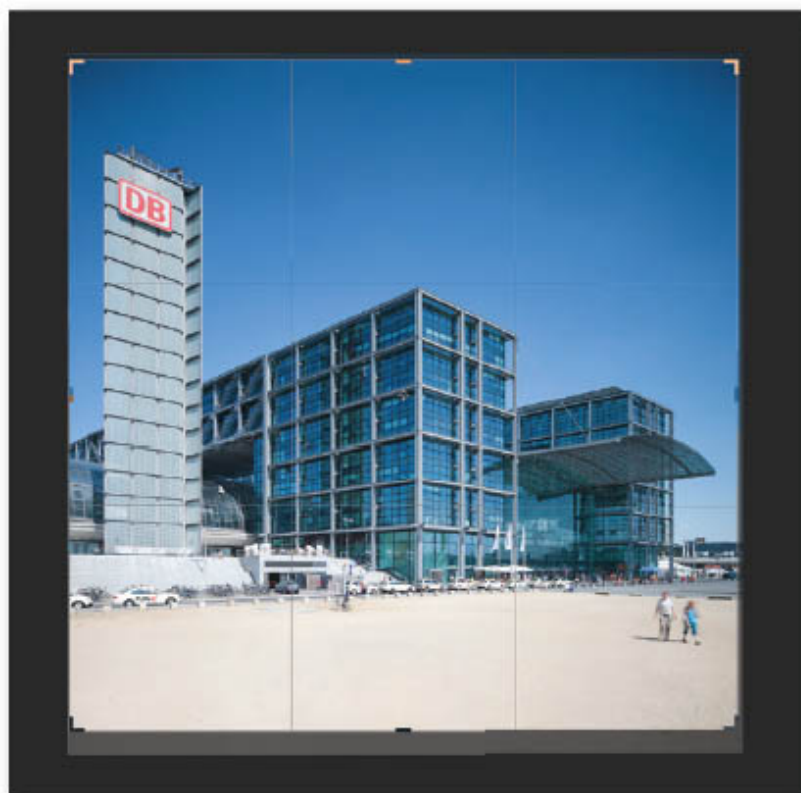


Fig. 365

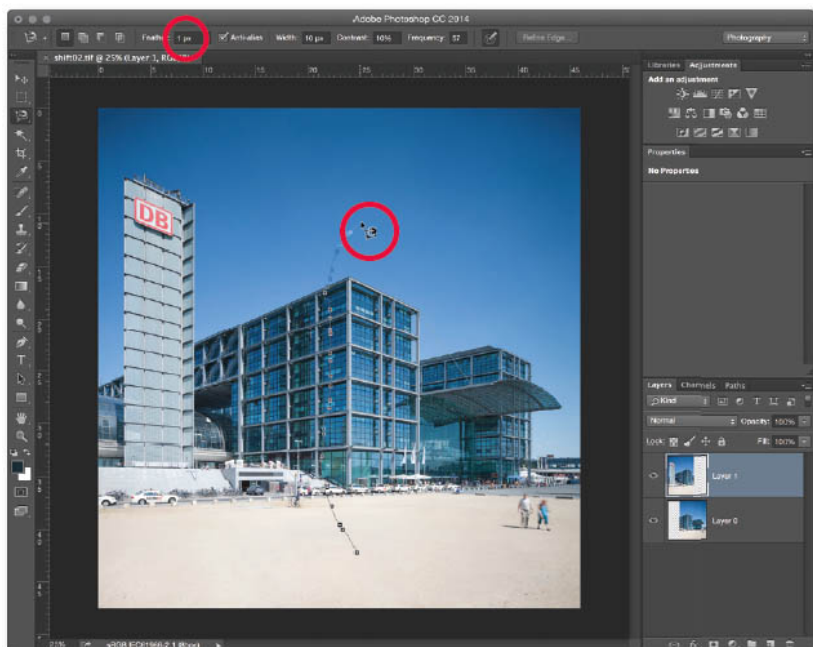


Fig. 366

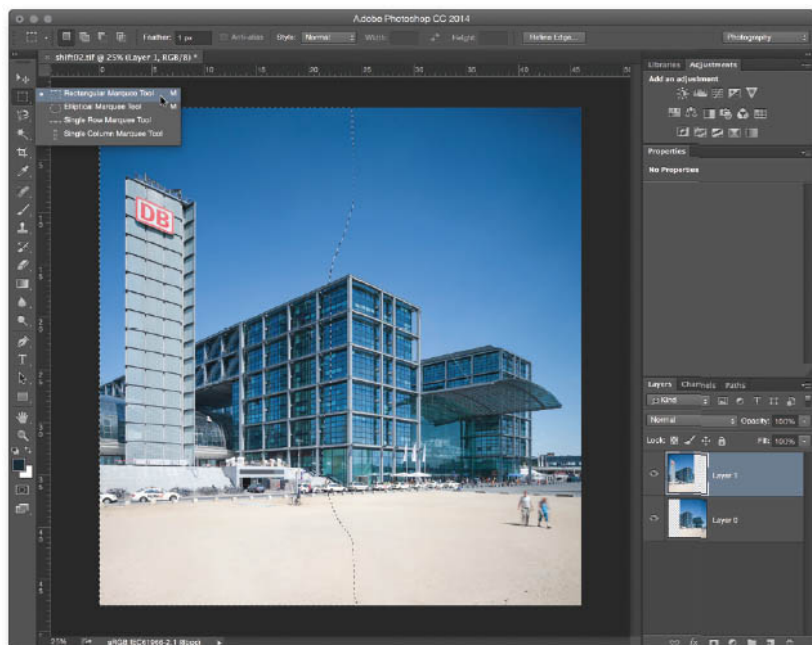


Fig. 367

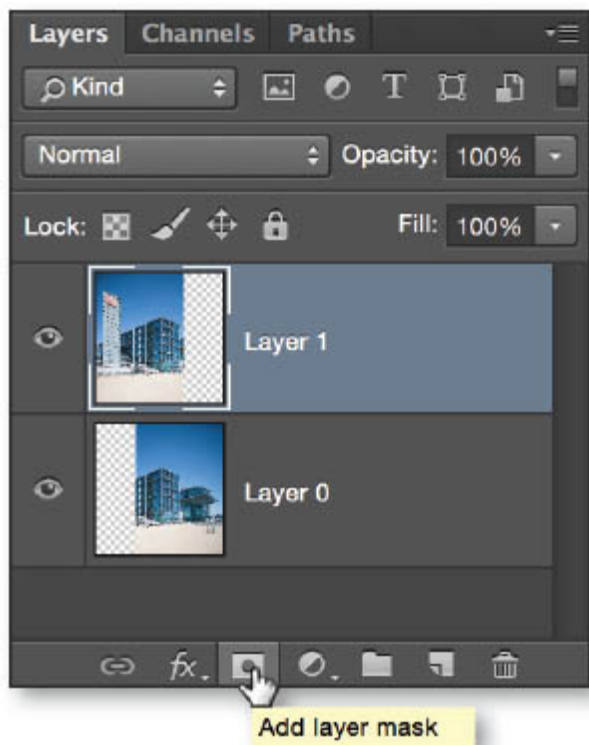


Fig. 368

4. You can now flatten your image (*Layer > Flatten Image*), and continue with your workflow. [Fig. 144](#) shows my finished panorama.

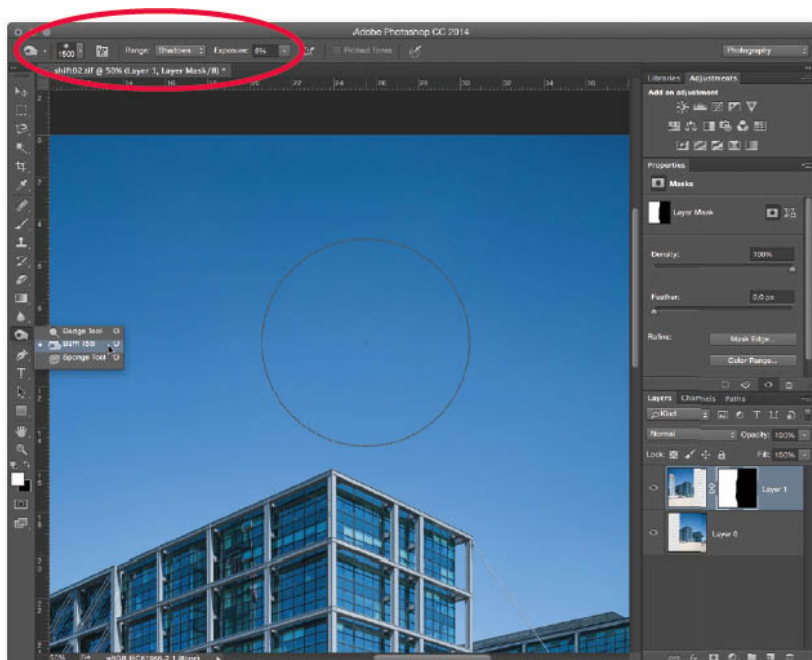


Fig. 369

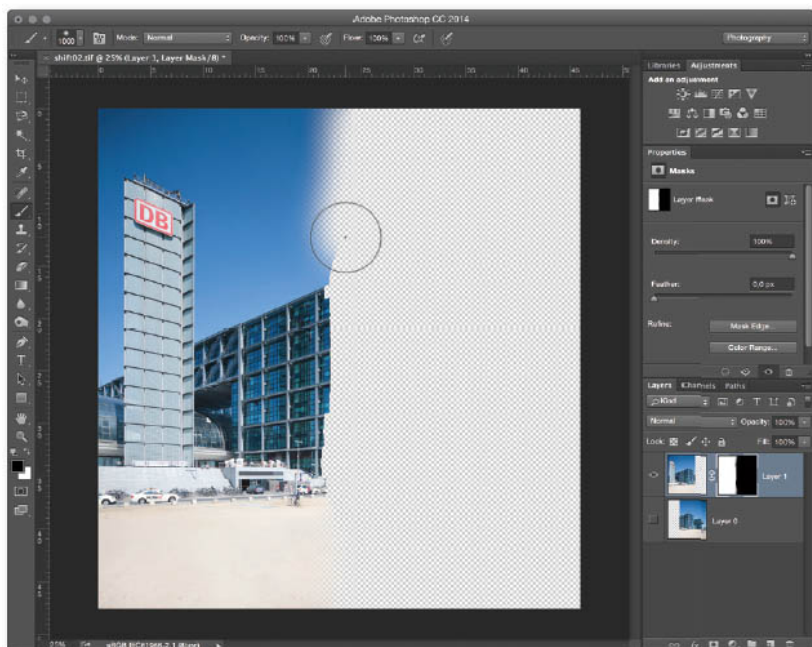


Fig. 370

4.5 HDR and DRI Images

HDR/DRI source images are shot using a bracketed sequence with varied exposure settings. This technique is used to portray subjects whose dynamic range exceeds that which the film or image sensor being used can capture in a single image. HDR techniques merge the extended dynamic range encompassed in multiple source images into a single 32-bit high-dynamic-range (HDR) image which is then compressed using a technique called “tone mapping” into an 8-bit or 16-bit format that can be displayed or printed using conventional output devices. DRI techniques merge multiple source images without increasing bit depth. HDR images are generally less realistic looking than DRI images, making the latter preferable for situations in which realism is critical.

There is a wide range of specialized HDR/DRI software available, and the following sections demonstrate how to perform the processes using the HDR and DRI-capable Photomatrix Pro 5 from HDRsoft, as well as using Photoshop. I’ll use Photoshop to perform automated 32-bit HDR processing as well as a manual DRI workflow.

4.5.1 Workflow:

Creating an HDR Image Using Photomatix Pro

Although Photomatix Pro is capable of opening a range of RAW formats, I converted my bracketed sequence ([fig. 371](#)) in advance to 16-bit TIFF format. I took this route because lens-based errors such as chromatic aberration or vignetting are more difficult to correct once HDR processing has taken place.



Fig. 371

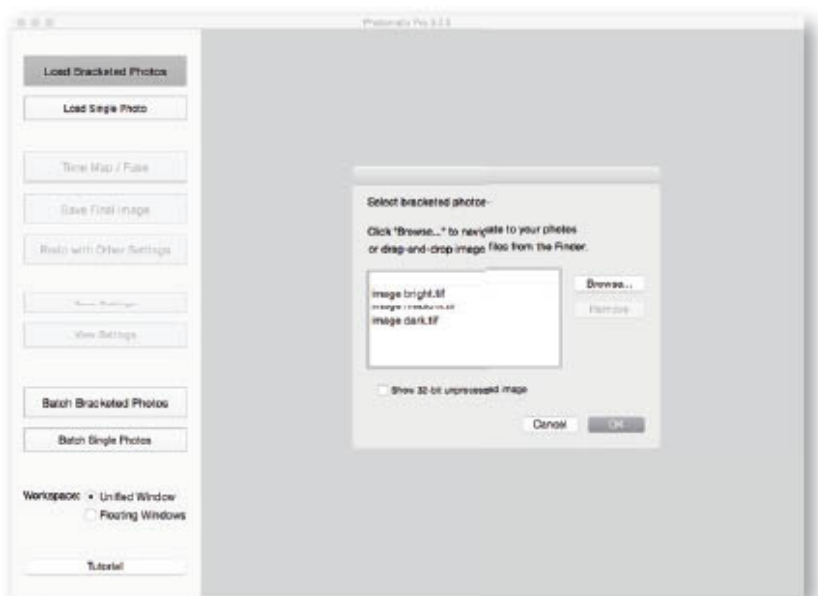


Fig. 372

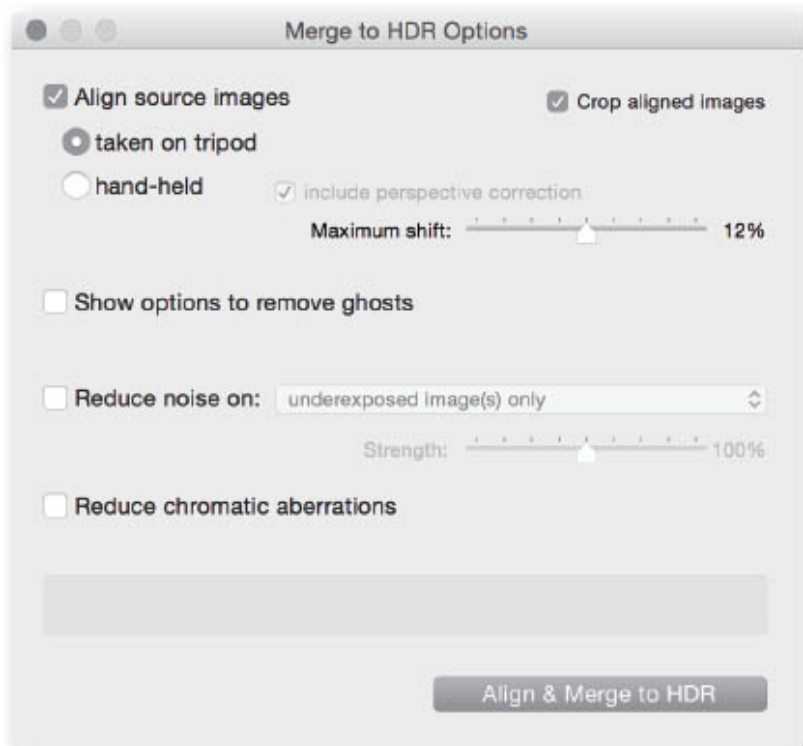


Fig. 373

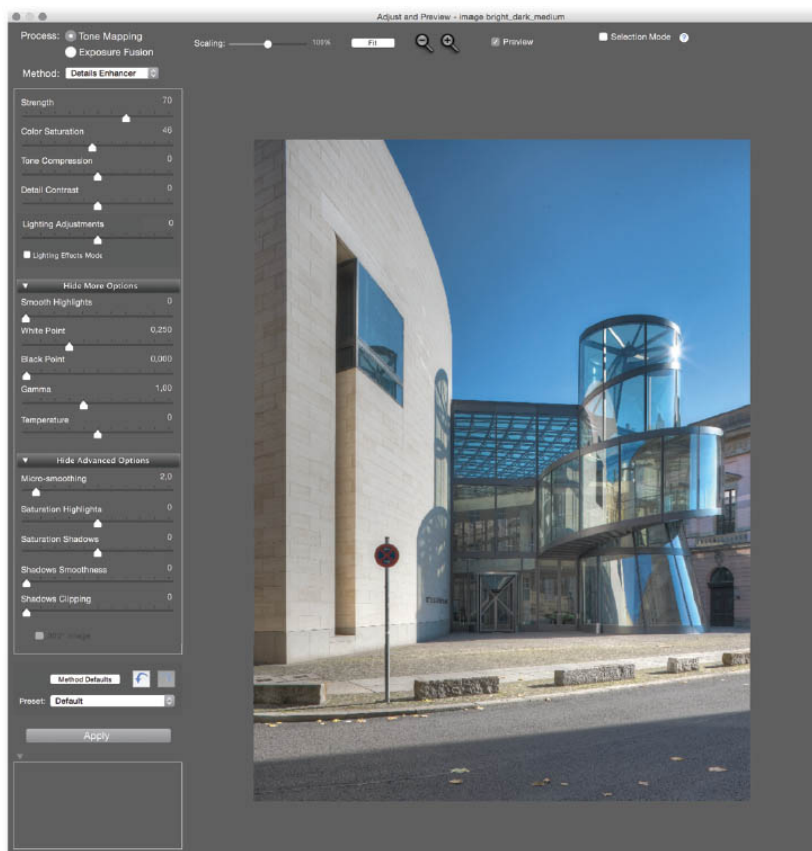


Fig. 374

1. Click the *Load Bracketed Photos* and select the images you want to merge in any order. It is not necessary to check the *Show 32-bit unprocessed image* option at this stage. Now click *OK* (fig. 372).

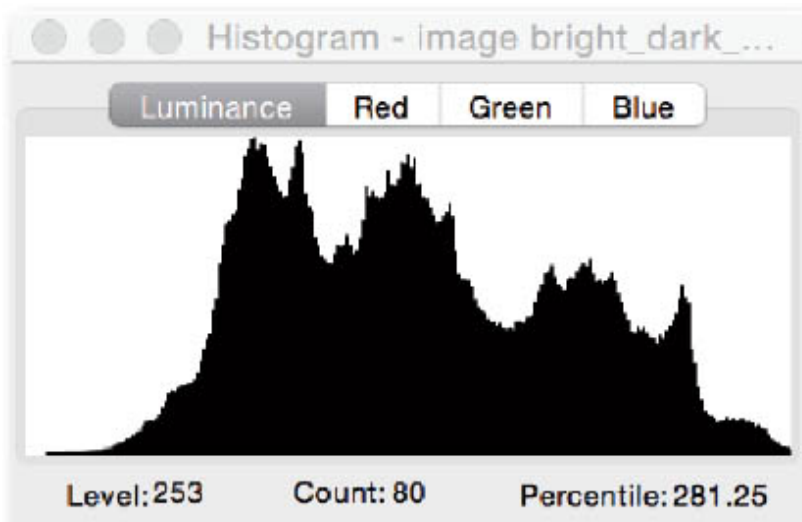


Fig. 375

2. Even if you shot your source images using a tripod, you should activate the *Align source images > taken on tripod* and *Crop aligned images* options in the dialog that follows. You only need to select the *Show options to remove ghosts* option if your source images contain objects (such as people or tree branches) that moved between shots. This is not the case in my example. I also have no need for the *Reduce noise on:* and *Reduce chromatic aberrations* options, as these are only relevant when I am processing unconverted RAW images. Now click *Align & Merge to HDR* to continue (fig. 373).
3. The following dialog includes tools for adjusting the parameters for both the *Details Enhancer* and *Tone Compressor* tone mapping methods. The dialog also includes a preview window that displays the changes you make in real time (fig. 374) and a histogram display for checking the distribution of tonal values within your image (fig. 375).

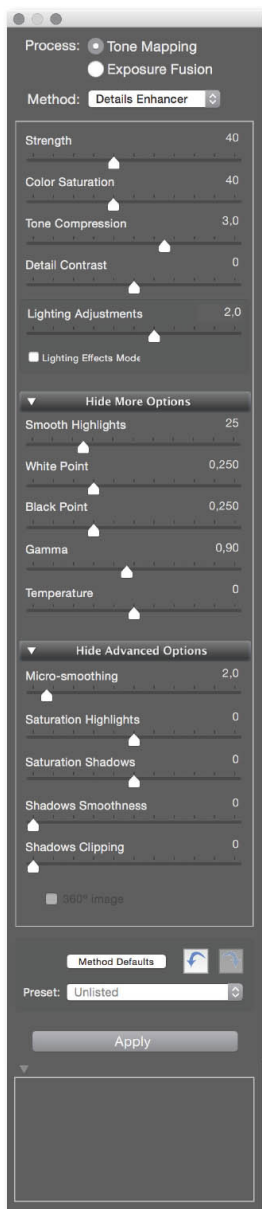


Fig. 376

4. The *Details Enhancer* tone mapping method increases local contrast and produces results that look more like a painting than a photograph (fig. 186). To obtain a realistic-looking result, don't

overdo it with the *Strength* slider, which controls the extent to which the contrast is enhanced, and handle the *Color Saturation* slider on a case-by-case basis (fig. 376). After that, adjust the sliders for *Tone Compression* (to modulate the dynamic range for the tone mapped image—negative values generally produce more realistic-looking images) and *Detail Contrast* (to modulate how strongly detail contrast is boosted). The *Lighting Adjustments* slider has a strong influence on how natural or surreal the image appears and should generally be set toward the right side. You can further refine your image with the *Smooth Highlights* feature under the *More Options* section. Adjusting this parameter allows you to reduce the contrast boost in the image highlights, which is useful if you want to remove halos around objects positioned in front of light backgrounds. The *White Point* and *Black Point* sliders allow you to define the maximum and minimum values, respectively, for the tone mapped image. Adjustments to the midtones and color temperature can be made with the *Gamma* and *Temperature* sliders. The controls within the *Advanced Options* section are relatively self-explanatory and offer yet additional ways to fine-tune your image. None of these additional variables were adjusted for my sample image. The optimum settings vary enormously from image to image, so trial and error is the best way to find out which work best. My aim was not to produce a dramatically tone-mapped image, but rather a natural looking one that forms the basis for further processing in Photoshop. Clicking the *Apply* button tone maps the image according to the settings made in the previous steps.

5. The tone-mapped image will now appear in the main program window.

At this point, it's still possible to correct contrast, color, and sharpness (fig. 377), although I don't apply any changes here in my example. Pressing the *Save Final Image* button allows you to save your image for further editing in Photoshop or other image editing programs. You can also use the *Save Settings* button to save the settings you used as a preset for later application to other images.

6. It is often useful to produce a second version of an image using the *Tone Compressor* tone mapping method. This method makes global adjustments to contrast and offers fewer processing options. It also tends to produce more natural looking results, although detail in

particularly bright or dark image areas gets lost more easily. Select the *Tone Compressor* method (fig. 378) and use the *Brightness*, *Tonal Range Compression*, and *Contrast Adaptation* sliders to make the basic settings for your image. Here too, the settings you make will depend on the type of image you are processing and the results you are aiming for. The method's other sliders are used to adjust image colors and to determine *White Clip* and *Black Clip*. Click *Apply* to apply your changes and save your image.

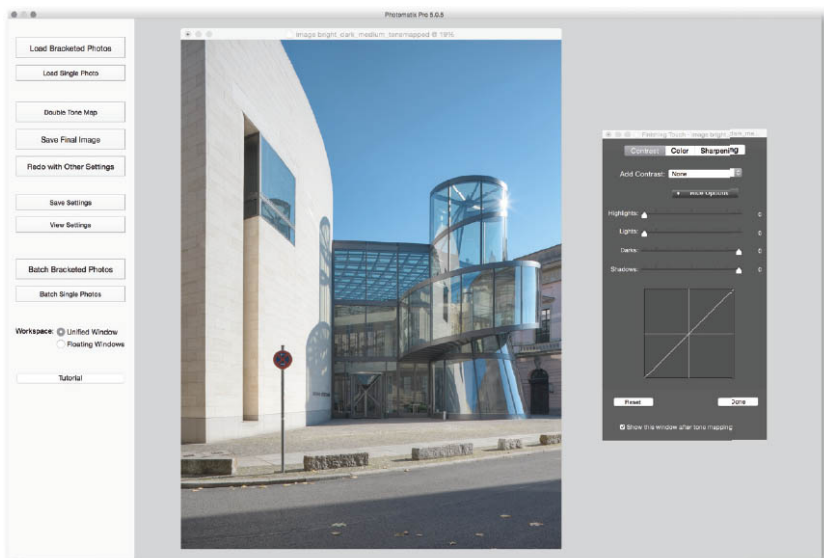


Fig. 377

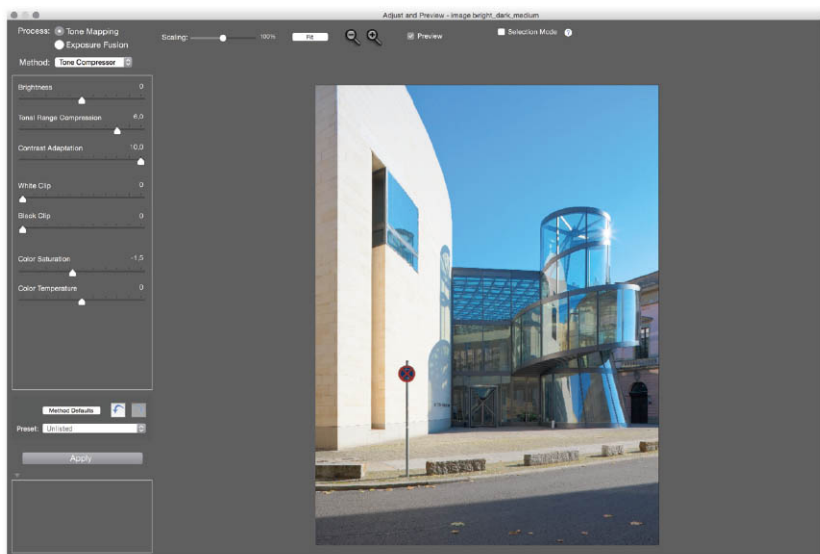


Fig. 378

4.5.2 Workflow:

DRI Processing in Photomatix Pro

Photomatix Pro's DRI functionality uses the image detail data stored in the highlights and shadows of your source images to create a new, enhanced-contrast image without altering the original color space or bit depth (i.e., no "real" HDR images are created during the process).

1. Load your source images as described in the previous sections.
2. Select the *Exposure Fusion* process and the *Fusion/Natural* method (fig. 379). You can then use the sliders to adjust your image. The *Strength* slider (which controls how much local contrast is boosted) should not be moved too high. The *Brightness* slider determines how strongly each source image is weighted: higher values prioritize the brighter images and lower values, the darker ones. *Local Contrast* modulates the image's detail contrast and overall impression of sharpness. The functions of the remaining sliders are similar to those described above for creating HDR images and allow for additional fine tuning. Clicking anywhere in the preview image opens the

Loupe window and gives you a detailed view of the effect of your adjustments (fig. 380). Once again, clicking *Apply* merges the source images into one.

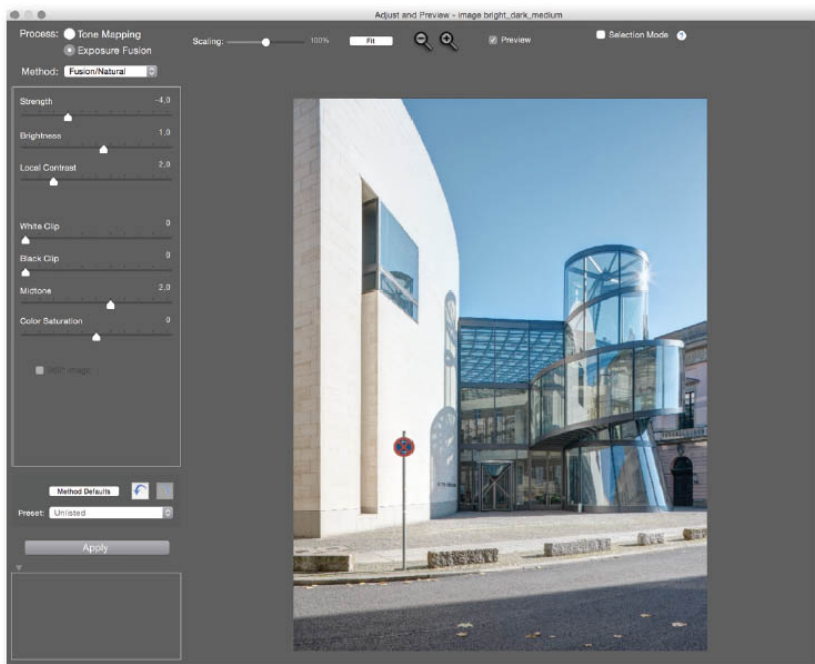


Fig. 379

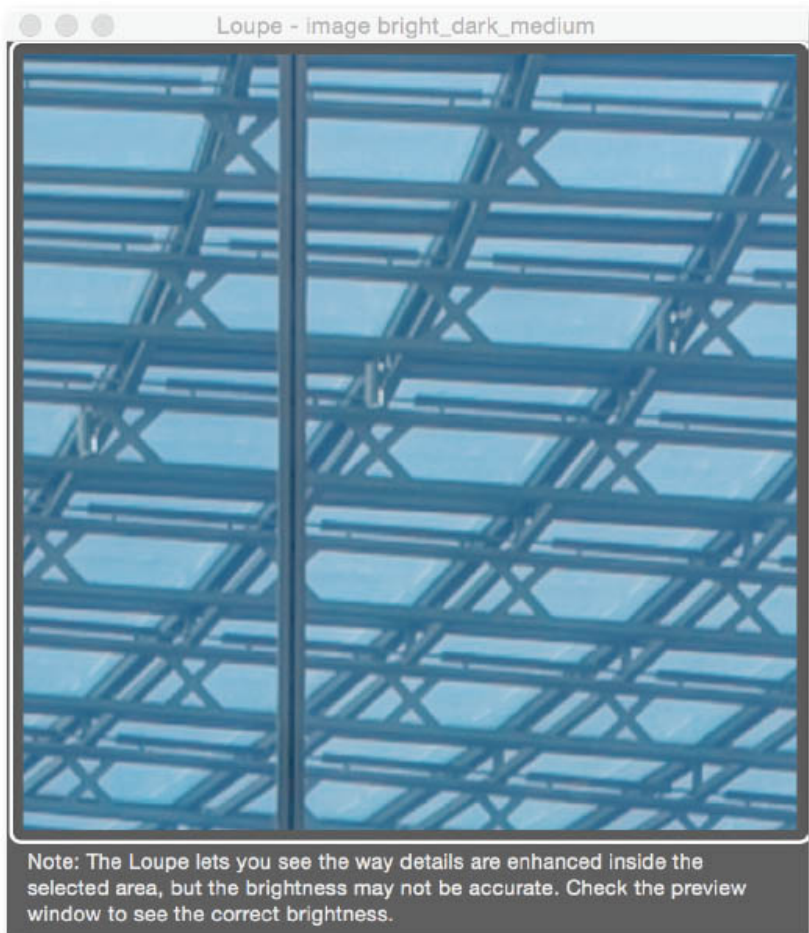


Fig. 380

4.5.3 Workflow:

Creating an HDR Image Using Photoshop

1. Photoshop's own built-in HDR tool is located under the *File > Automate > Merge to HDR Pro* command. Because the entire process takes place within the Photoshop environment, you can use any RAW format that is supported by Adobe Camera Raw. This tool, too, works best if you use it to merge ready-optimized RAW images, although you can use source images stored in any other common

format as well (fig. 381).

2. Clicking *OK* starts the automatic merging process. If your files contain no Exif data for shutter speed, aperture, and ISO speed (page 229), you can enter them manually in the *Manually Set EV* dialog that then appears automatically. The program window then includes thumbnails for each image that display the exposure increments used while shooting the sequence (fig. 382). Removing the check mark from the box next to an image deactivates it.

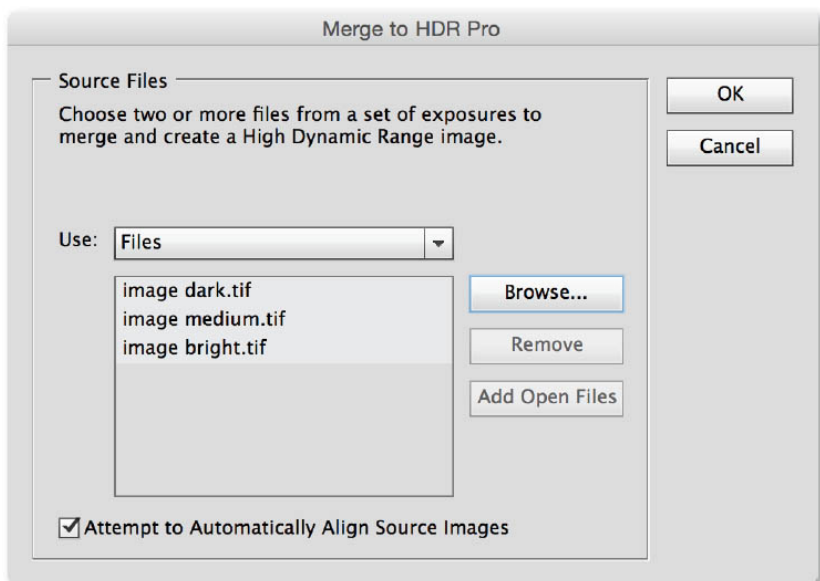


Fig. 381

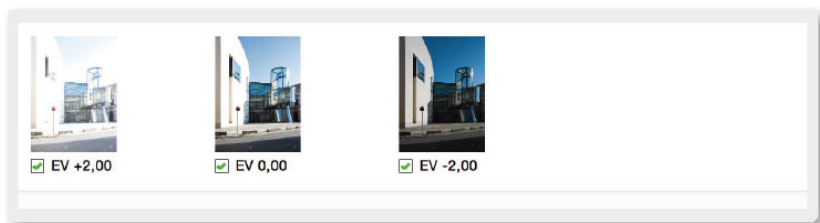


Fig. 382

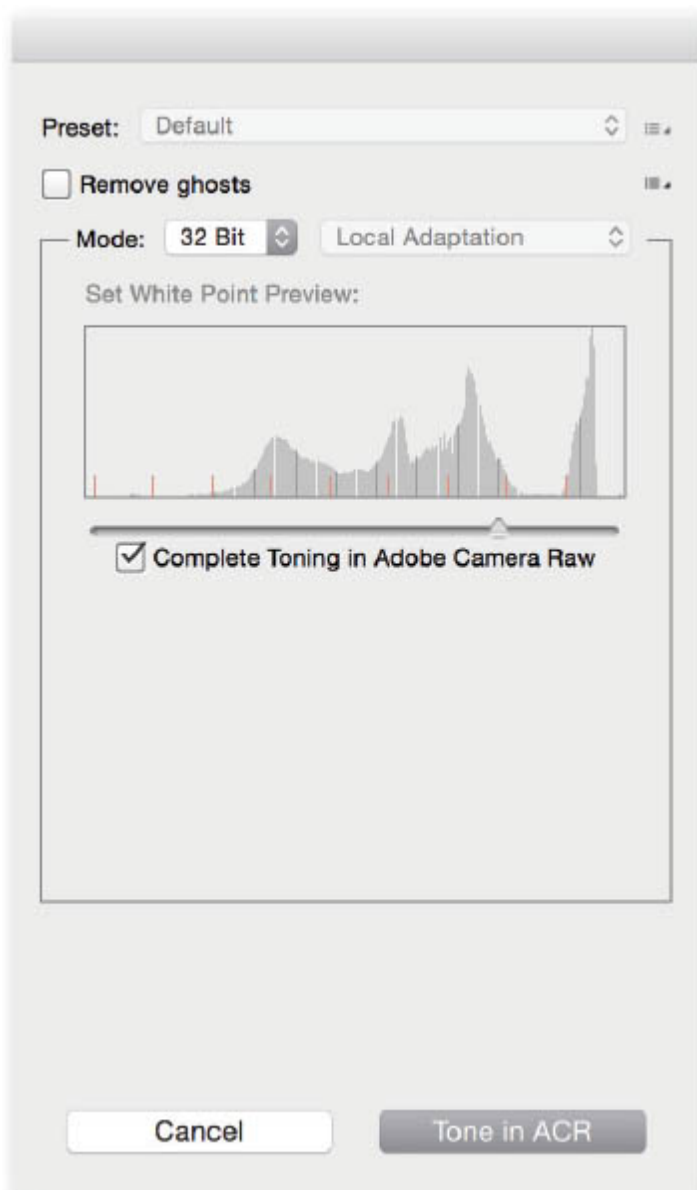


Fig. 383

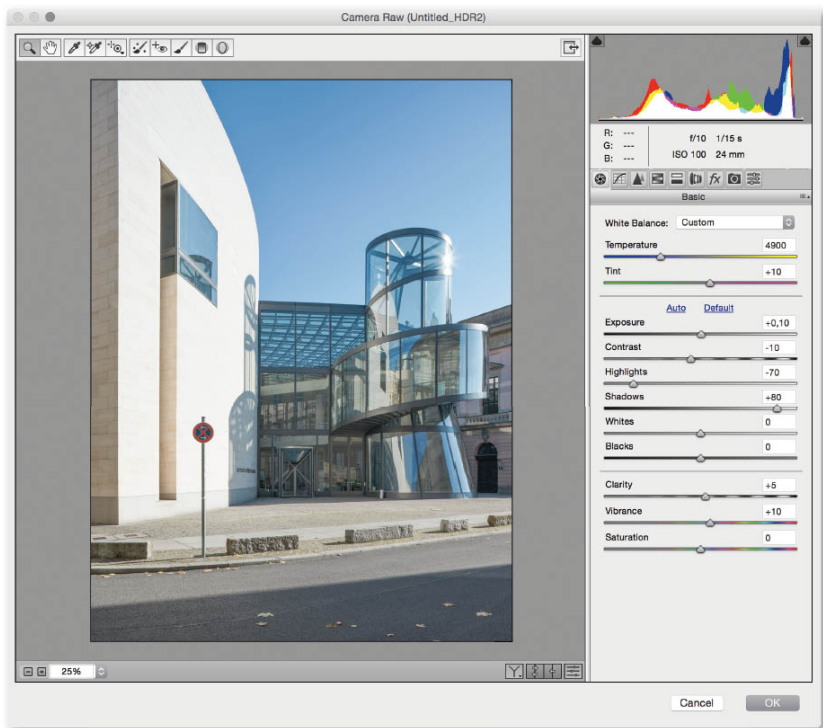


Fig. 384

3. The correct choice of *Mode* is very important to the success of the procedure. If you select *8 Bit* or *16 Bit*, you can adjust your HDR conversion parameters manually (Step 4), whereas if you select *32 Bit*, the compilation process in this window ends and, assuming *Complete Toning in Adobe Camera Raw* is checked, you'll open the 32-bit file in ACR Converter (fig. 383). The *White Point Preview* slider makes it easy to view the available tones and adjusts the brightness of the central preview image. The settings here alter only the rough HDR preview on your screen and not the actual range of contrast in your HDR image data. Once you open the image by pressing the *Tone in ACR* button, you can optimize your HDR image using the same methods of adjustment that will be familiar from the RAW conversion process (especially important are the values for *Exposure*, *Highlights*, and *Shadows*, fig. 384). And you can convert the image into a conventional 8-bit or 16-bit file (*Image > Mode > 8 Bits/Channel* or *16 Bits/Channel* and *Method > Exposure and Gamma* with the values *0.00* and *1.00*, respectively). If you don't

check the box, you'll create a 32-bit file, which can be saved and opened at a later point in time with ACR Converter for further editing. To do this, open the already created 32-bit file in Photoshop and select *Camera Raw Filter* under the *Filter* menu.

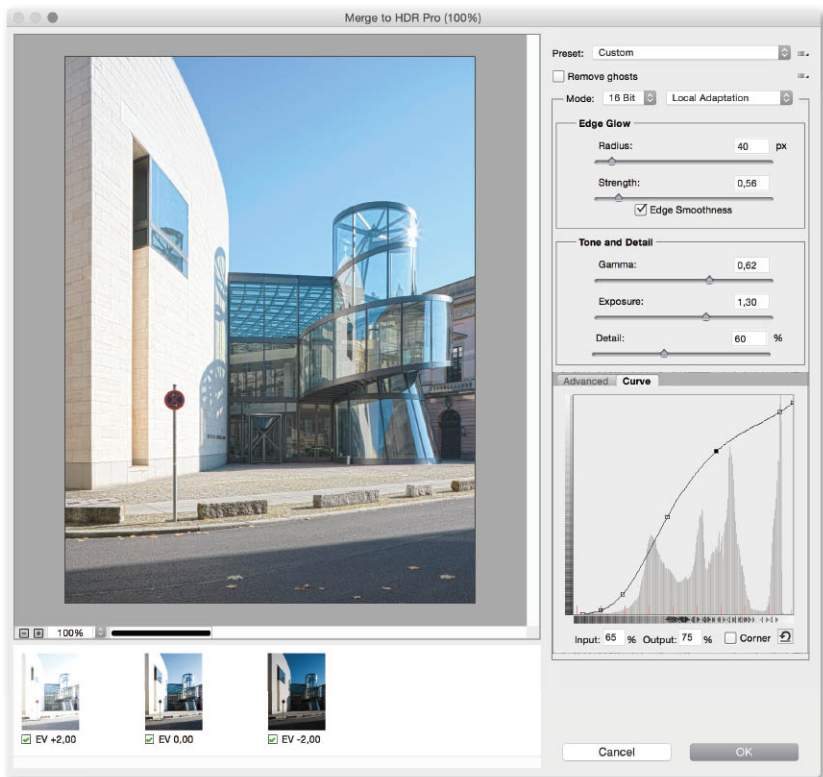


Fig. 385

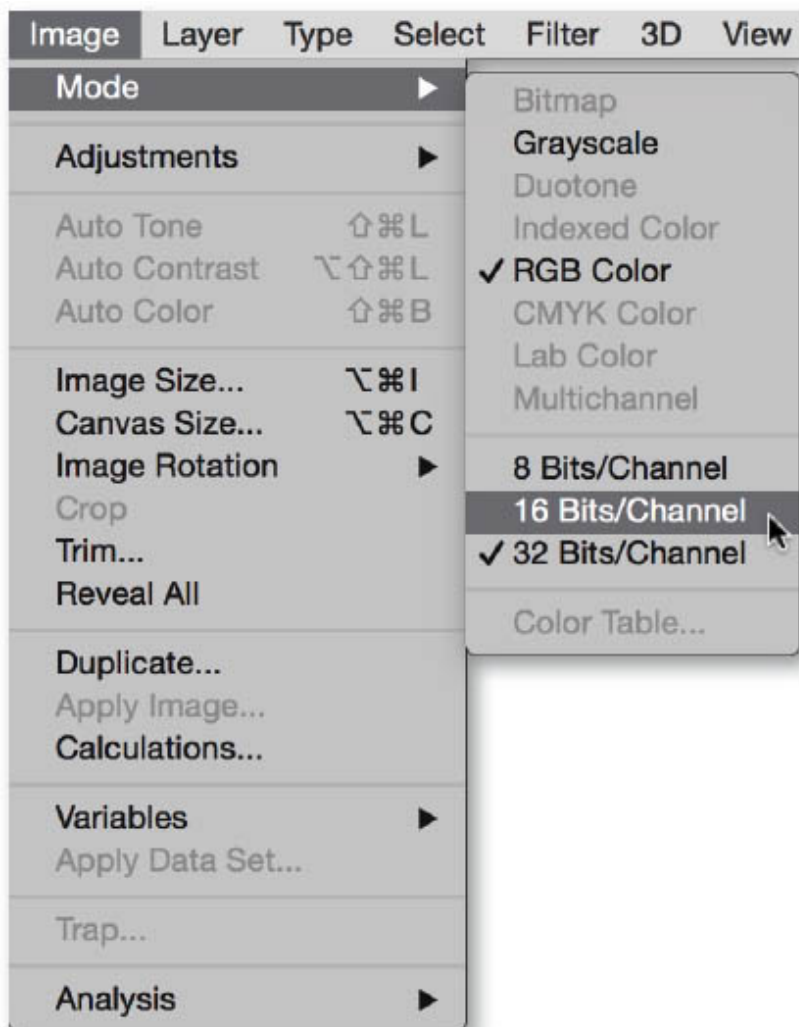


Fig. 386

4. There are various compression options available in 8-bit and 16-bit modes. *Local Adaptation* is the most flexible (fig. 385). I can't make any concrete recommendations for the *Radius* and *Strength* settings, but the ones shown in my example provided me with very good results. One very important factor in the compression process is the selection of appropriate adjustments to the *Tone Curve*. Activate the Curve window and shift the ends of the curve itself to the ends of the histogram peaks. Giving the curve a slight "S" shape increases

overall contrast if necessary. Once you have made all the necessary changes, click *OK* to open the compressed HDR image for further processing. If you've already saved your image in the 32-bit format during an earlier step and now would like to adjust the dynamic range, open the file in Photoshop. After navigating to *Image > Mode > 8 Bits/Channel* or *16 Bits/Channel* you'll find the *HDR Toning* dialog box, where you can adjust the familiar conversion parameters (fig. 386).

4.5.4 Workflow:

DRI Processing in Photoshop

1. Although Photoshop has no dedicated DRI tool, it is nevertheless possible to use it to manually merge individual source images from a bracketed sequence. To do this, use the *File > Scripts > Load Files into Stack* command, choose your source files (fig. 387), click *Ok*, and then arrange the layers according to the sequence of exposure (the darkest image at the bottom).

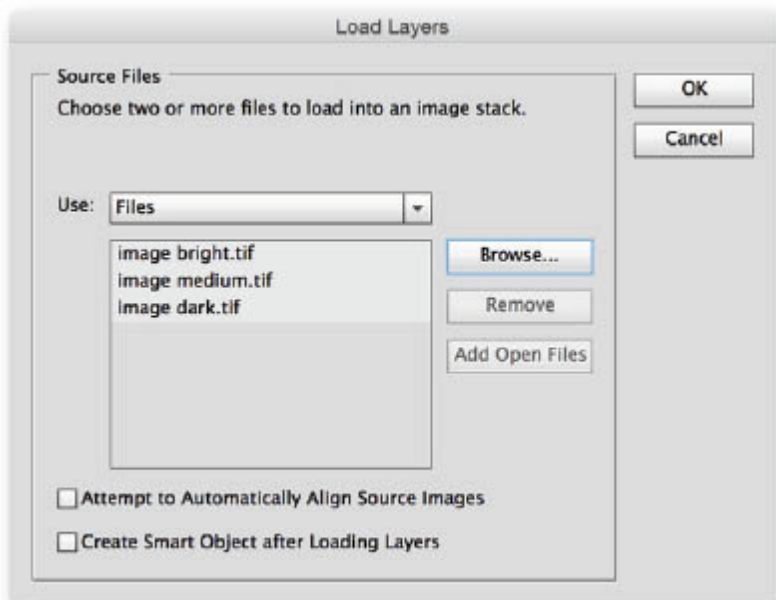
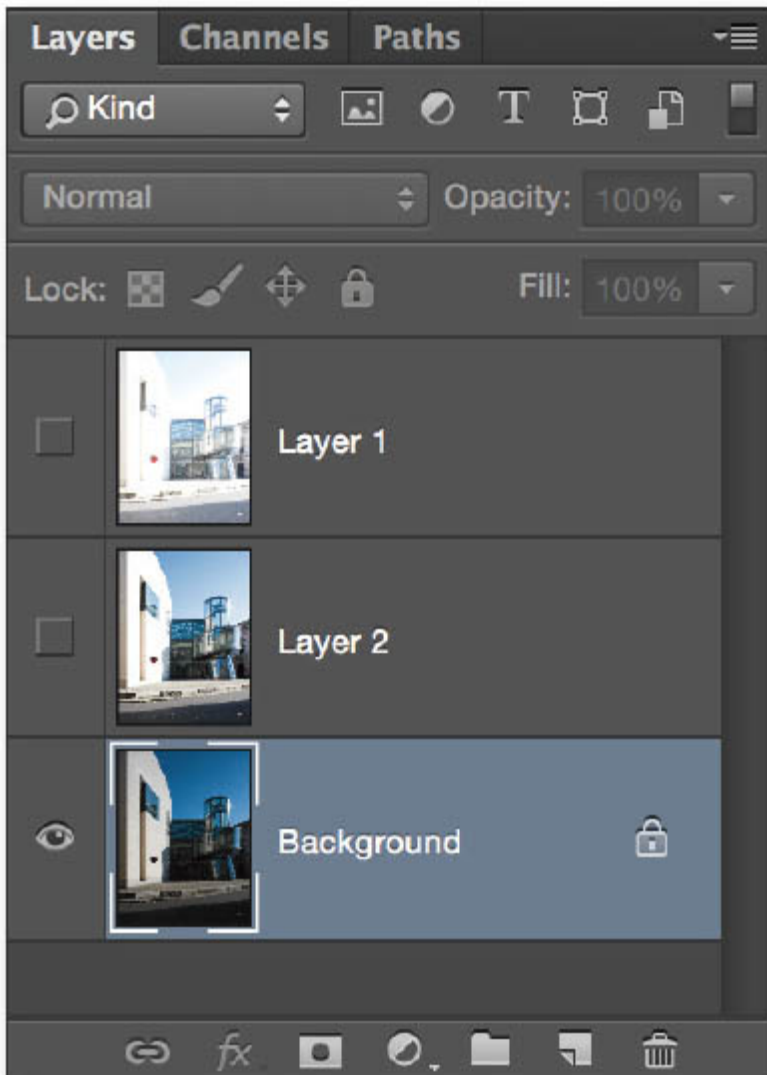


Fig. 387

2. Now hide the upper (brighter) two layers by clicking on the eye icons in the *Layers* panel (fig. 388) and activate the darkest image. Use the *Select > Shadows* option in the *Select > Color Range* dialog to create a selection that includes only the darker parts of the lower image (fig. 389). The *Fuzziness* and *Range* sliders can be left in their default positions, but tweaking them may be useful to carry out final adjustments.



3. Activate and show the middle layer and click the *Add Layer Mask* button at the bottom of the Layers panel (fig. 390). The parts of the layer mask that are black become transparent, while the original image remains visible in white areas.
4. Click the *Mask Edge* button in the *Masks* panel and activate the *Smart Radius* option with a value of between 40 and 80 pixels in the dialog that follows (fig. 391). Set the *Smooth* and *Contrast* sliders to 0 and *Feather* to less than 5. Click *OK* to confirm your settings.
5. Repeat the same procedure (steps 2–4) with the next overlying layer. But make sure that the top layer remains hidden. Then activate the middle layer and once again select *Shadows* from the *Color Range* dialog. This time the same selection process will be applied to the top level, which will be made visible and adjusted with the *Mask Edge* button.

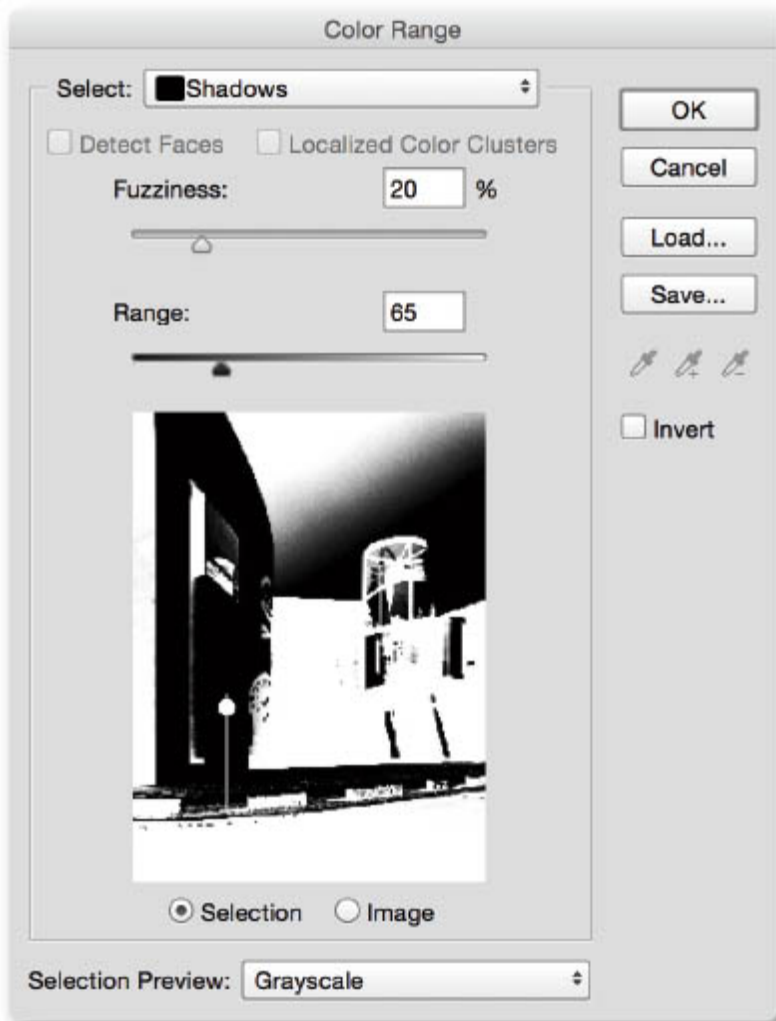


Fig. 389

6.Reduce *Opacity* and *Density* (in the *Masks* panel) for the middle layers.

I used values of *50%* in my example. Proceed in the same way with the top layers (fig. 392). You should treat the values recommended in this example as a rough starting point. The best settings depend largely on the subject at hand.

7.Optimize your results by setting the *Feather* value in the *Masks* panel

to between *100* and *250* pixels. This increases local contrast, but can produce halos at the transitions between high-contrast and uniformly colored image areas. These can be removed by painting directly into the active layer mask using a soft, black brush with a large radius ([fig. 393](#)).

8. You can further refine your results by experimenting with different opacities and blend modes such as *Screen*.
9. Once you are done, flatten your image to a single layer using the *Layer > Flatten Image* command.

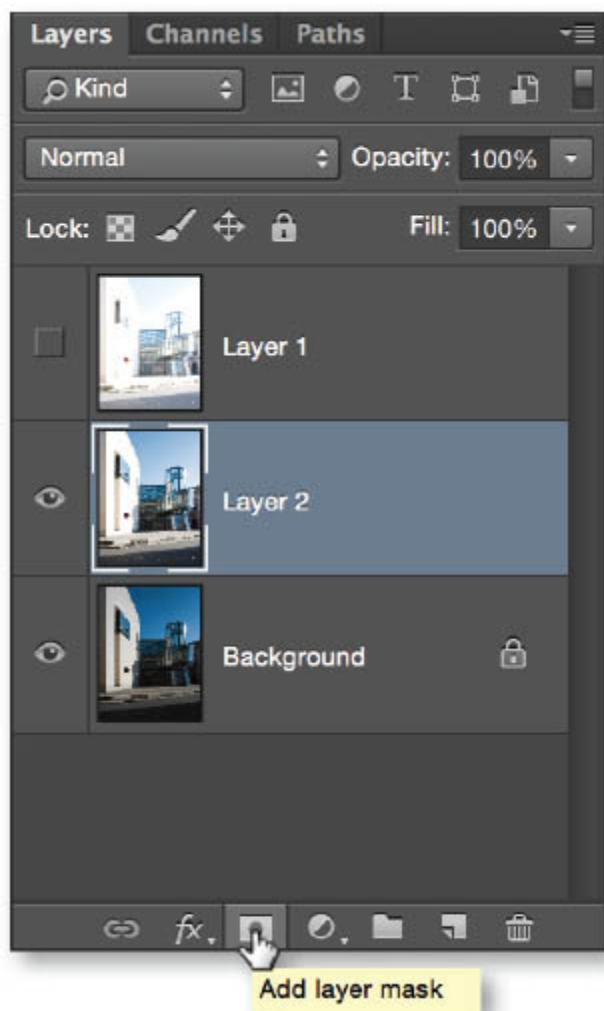


Fig. 390

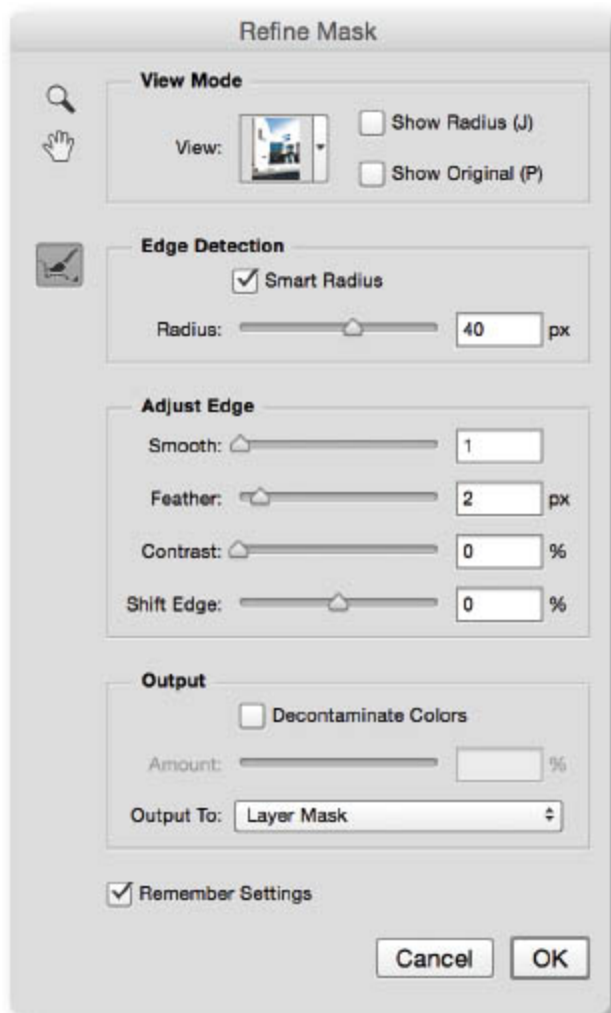


Fig. 391

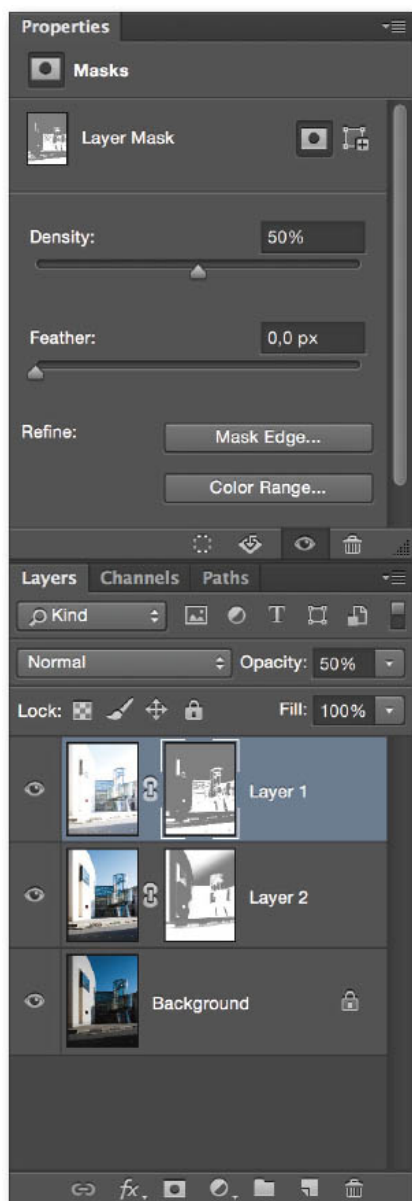


Fig. 392

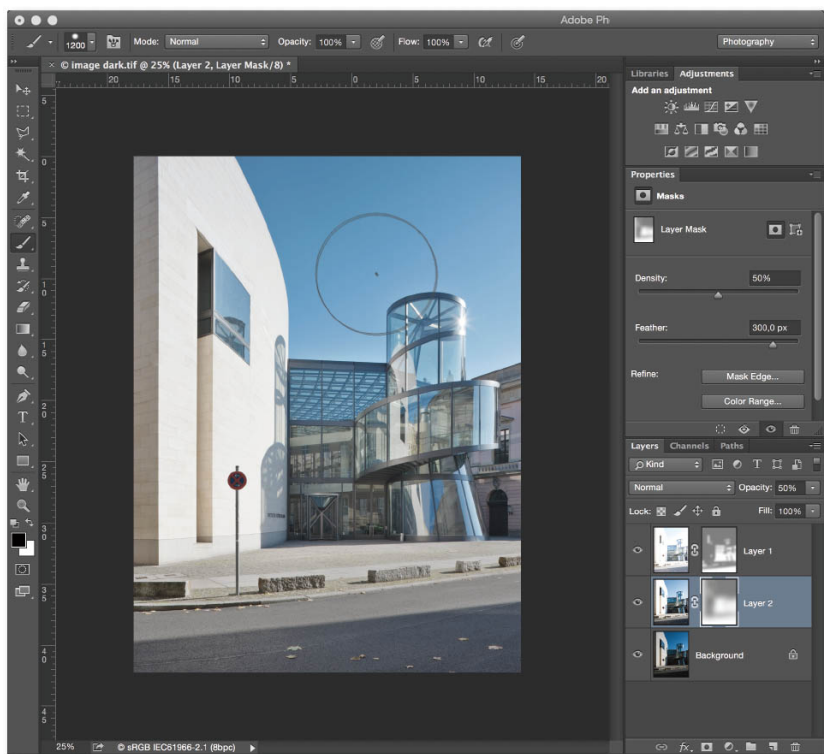


Fig. 393

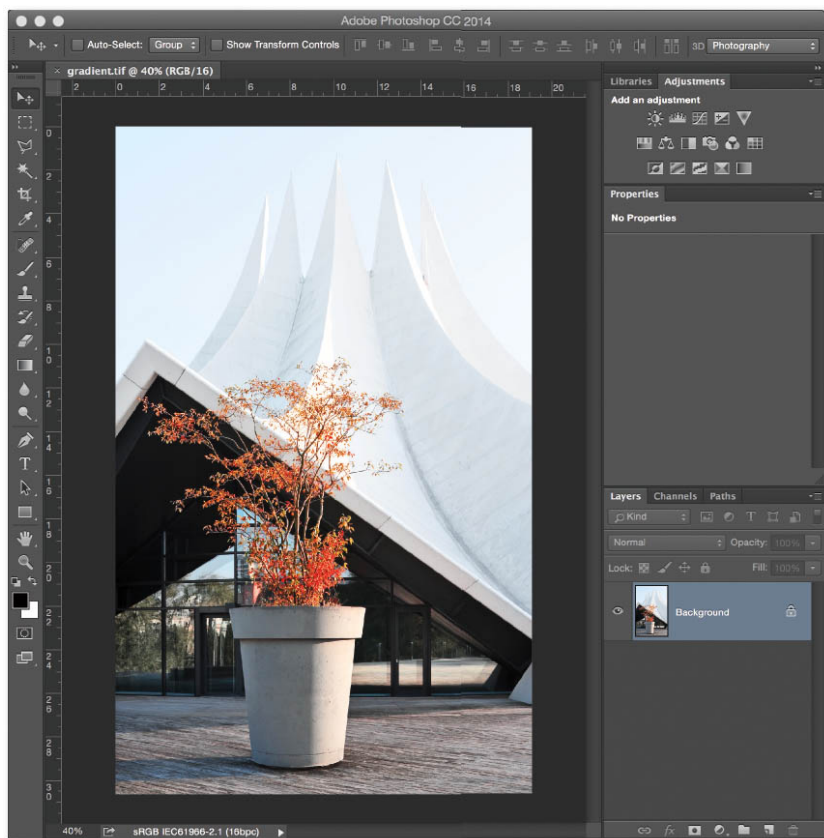


Fig. 394

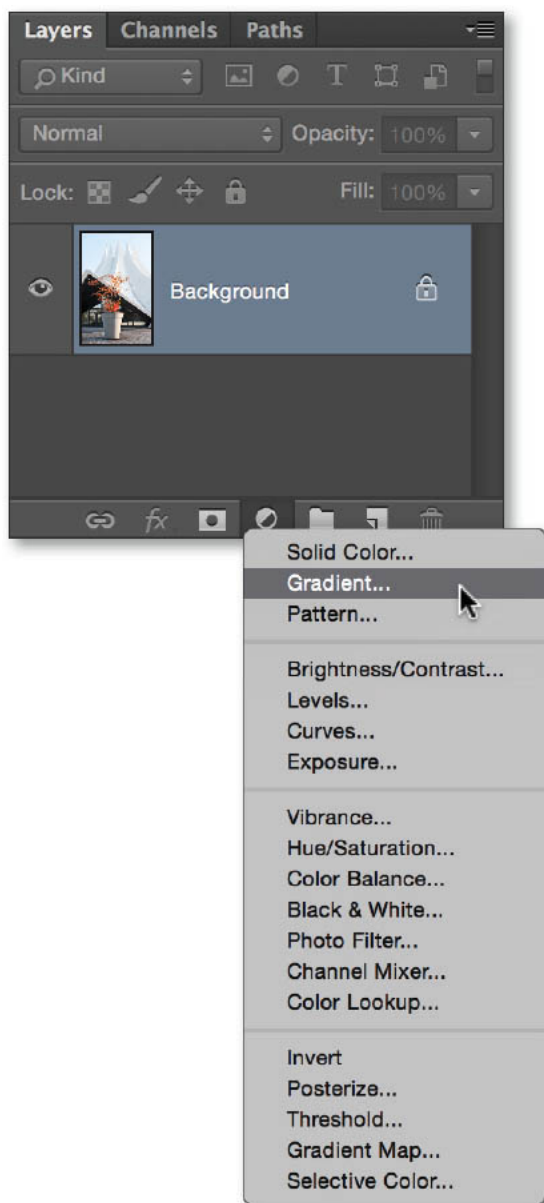


Fig. 395

4.6 Creative Tips and Tricks

The following sections offer a few ideas for experiments in creative image

processing.

4.6.1 Digital Graduated Filters

A physical graduated filter affects the amount of light reaching the film or sensor during the exposure, whereas a digital filter can be applied only to the dynamic range of the captured image and is thus not as effective. It is nevertheless a useful tool that can be applied and removed at will using a separate layer. The steps for applying a digital gradient to my sample image (fig. 394) are as follows:

Select black for the foreground color, which can be easily done by pressing the *D* key, a shortcut for resetting the foreground to the default. Create a new fill layer using the *Layer > New Fill Layer > Gradient* command (or by clicking the *Create a new fill or adjustment layer* button in the *Layers* panel and selecting *Gradient*, fig. 395). In the *Gradient Fill* dialog that follows, select the *Linear Style* option and an *Angle* value of *90*. Now activate the *Reverse* and *Align with layer* options and make sure that the *Scale* value is set to *100* (fig. 396). Now double click the gradient thumbnail to activate the *Gradient Editor*. Select the *Foreground to Transparent* preset, and move the top right-hand preview slider to the left until the *Location* value is *60%* (fig. 397). Now double-click *OK* to return to the main program window. Select the *Soft Light* blend mode for the new fill layer (fig. 398). The new gradient fill can be adjusted at any time by double clicking the layer thumbnail. The sequence of steps described here can also be saved as a Photoshop action, which you can then apply automatically to any other image.

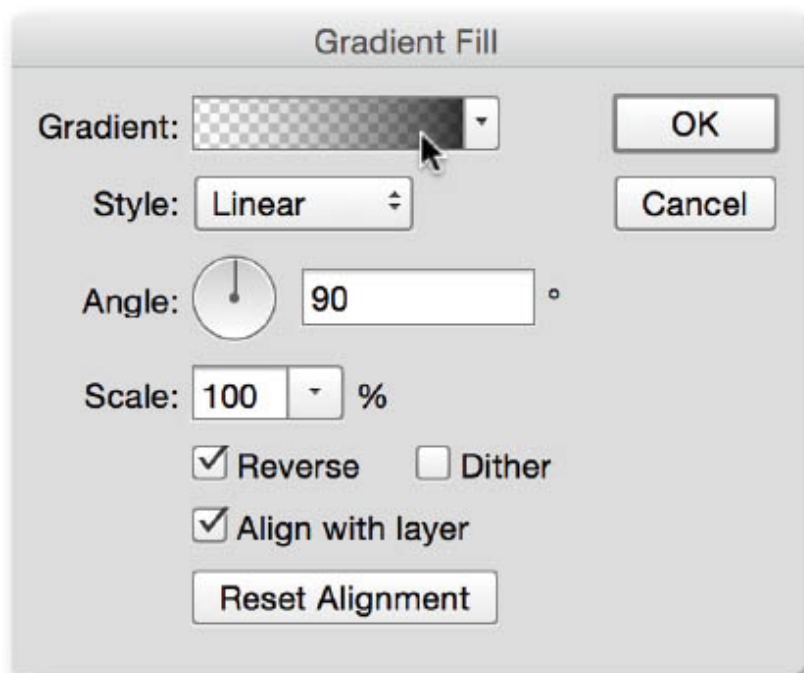


Fig. 396

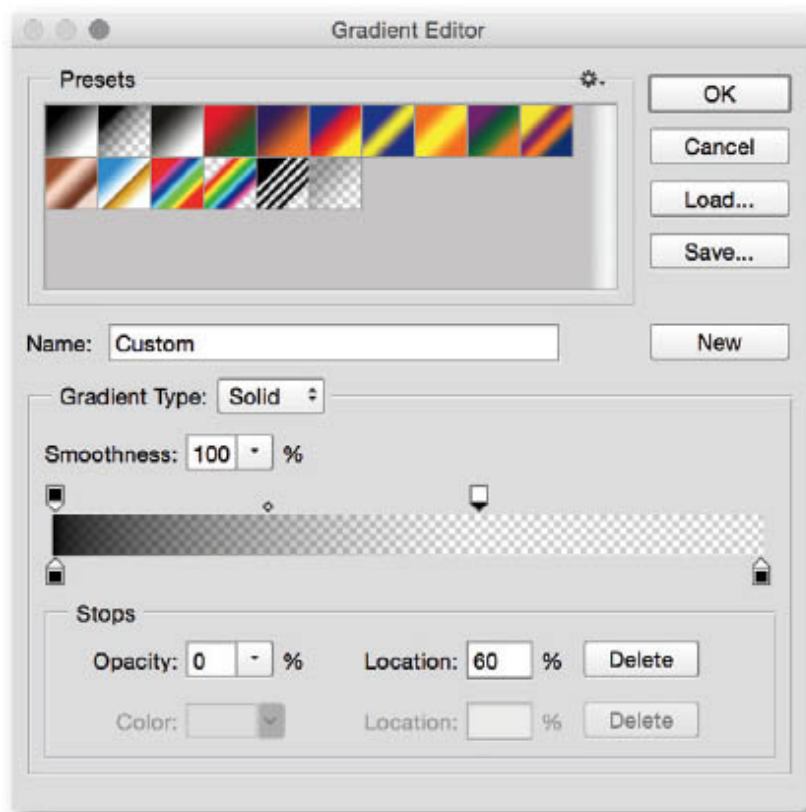


Fig. 397

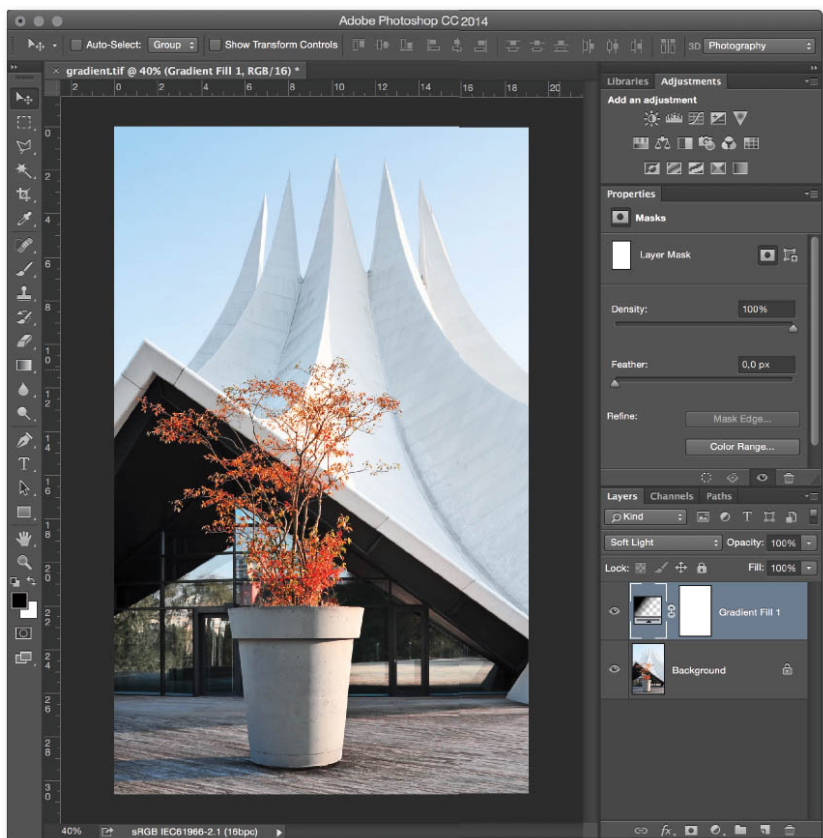


Fig. 398

4.6.2 Creating HDR Effects Using a Single RAW Source Image

RAW files store much more detail than JPEG files, especially in highlights and shadows. This wealth of image data makes it possible to create pseudo-HDR images out of single RAW files with software programs such as Photomatix Pro. To get started, open the desired image file with the *Load Single Photo* button in the *Workflow Shortcuts* panel and confirm the following window by pressing *OK*. This will convert your image into a pseudo-HDR image that can then be tone mapped in the usual way. This type of image displays moreover-bright highlights and more noise than a real HDR image created from a sequence of source images (fig. 399).

Photoshop has no built-in pseudo-HDR functionality, but can be used to process an (ideally 16-bit) image using the *Image > Adjustments > HDR Toning* dialog. You can also use Adobe Camera Raw to create two differently exposed versions of a single RAW file and manually merge them into a single DRI image (section 4.5.4).

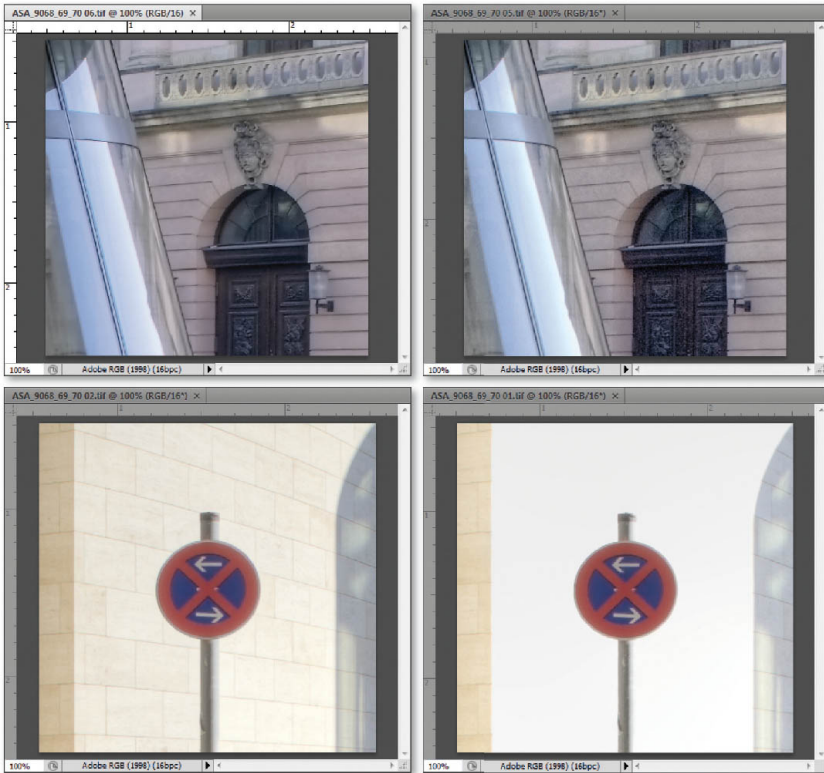


Fig. 399: Comparing an HDR image created from a bracketing sequence (on the left) with a pseudo-HDR image created using a single source photo

4.6.3 Converting Images to Black-and-White Using Photoshop

Photoshop includes a simple and effective tool for converting color images to black-and-white. It is advisable to apply the effect on a separate adjustment layer so that you can undo or adjust it if necessary. Either select the *Black & White* dialog in the *Adjustments* panel (fig. 400) or use the *Layer > New Adjustment Layer > Black & White* command. The sliders in

the dialog window allow you to adjust the strength of various tonal ranges for the newly created monochrome version of your image. The further to the right you move a slider, the lighter its corresponding grayscale value will be, while the opposite is true for values toward the left end of the scale (fig. 401). The tool includes a number of presets that simulate the effects of analog lens filters. The *Tint* option can be used to give your image an overall tint, and the default tone is sepia. You can adjust your black-and-white settings losslessly at any time by clicking on the adjustment layer thumbnail. You can also convert images to black-and-white in Photoshop by applying a saturation value of -100 in the *Image > Adjustments > Hue/Saturation* dialog, or by applying the *Image > Adjustments > Desaturate* command, although both of these methods are not as flexible as the *Black & White* tool. There are also a number of black-and-white presets available in the *Image > Adjustments > Channel Mixer* dialog (be sure to activate the *Monochrome* option). The *Vibrance* dialog can also be used to desaturate color images and you can, of course, perform monochrome conversion during RAW conversion, too.

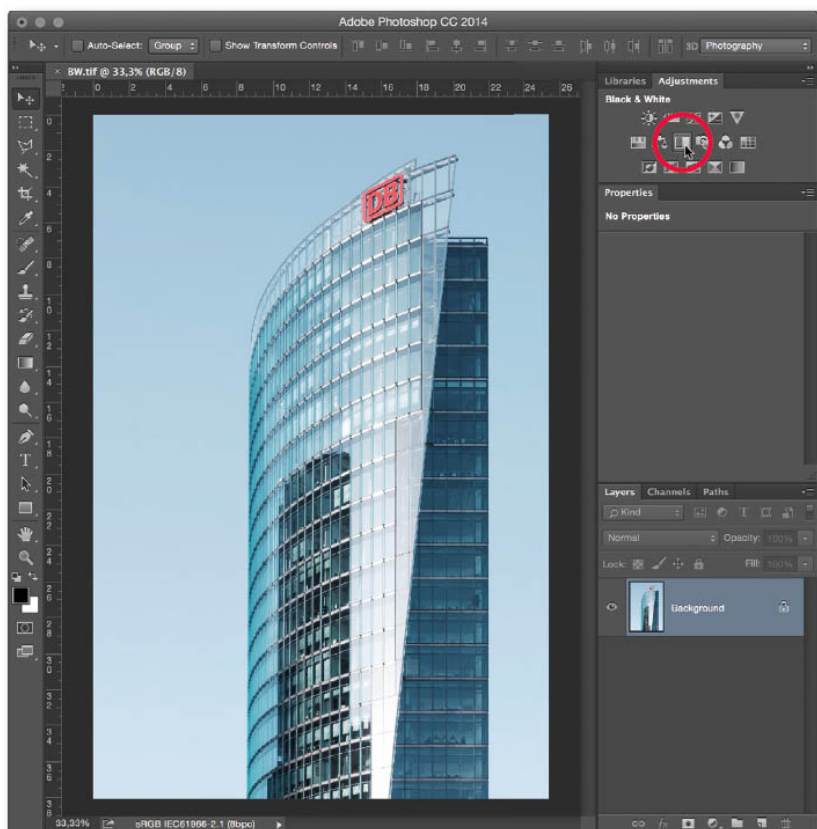


Fig. 400

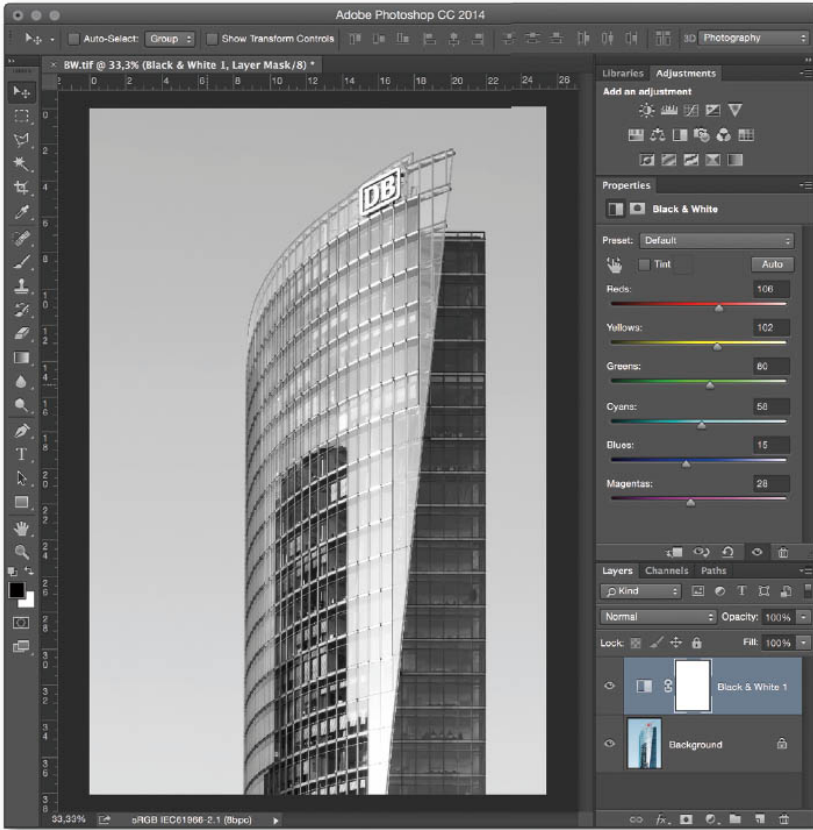


Fig. 401

4.6.4 Creating Fake Miniatures Using Photoshop

To create a “fake miniature” look using Photoshop, you have to reduce depth of field artificially by applying two focus gradients to an image. The most effective results can be produced using source images with relatively large depth of field that were taken from a raised viewpoint (fig. 402) and which contain a number of objects for comparing scale (in my example, cars). Objects in the near foreground spoil the effect, so try to avoid including any if possible. With version CS6, Photoshop has made it very easy to create miniature effects by navigating to *Filter > Blur* (or *Blur Gallery* in Photoshop CC), and then selecting the *Tilt-Shift* filter (fig. 403). Then place the pin at the center of the area in your image where you would like the maximum sharpness to occur and adjust the two solid lines to

modulate how much of your image should remain in focus: the area between these two lines will be sharp (a relatively narrow area of sharpness will create a more pronounced miniature effect). The area between the solid lines and dashed lines is a transition area, where the blur becomes more significant and the image areas above the top dashed line and below the bottom dashed line feature the full blur effect. The *Blur* slider determines how pronounced the blur appears (it should be significant). Press *OK* when you're satisfied with the effect. The *Distortion* slider allows you to apply an element of motion to the blur in the blurred area in the bottom part of the image (and in the top part, too, if you select the *Symmetric Distortion* option). These adjustments are best applied only to highly abstract images.



Fig. 402

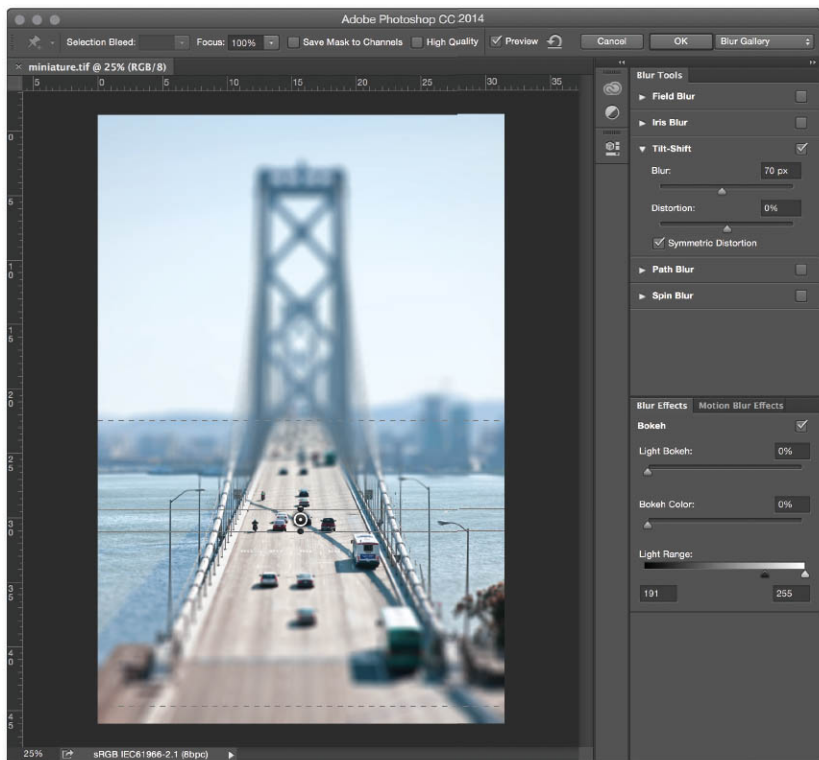


Fig. 403

It's also possible to create a miniature effect manually. First set the foreground color to black. Then activate the *Gradient Tool*, double-click the gradient preview, and select the *Foreground to Transparent* preset in the *Gradient Editor* window (fig. 404). Switch to *Quick Mask Mode* (fig. 405). You can now create two gradients (marked in red), which show the areas of the image that will appear blurred in the finished version (fig. 406). Switch back to *Normal Mode* (using the same button)—the red gradients will disappear and the area that is to remain in focus appears as a selection. Keep the selection active and select the *Filter > Blur > Lens Blur* filter (fig. 407). Select a high *Radius* value and optimize the results by changing the *Shape* setting and adjusting the *Blade Curvature* and *Rotation* sliders. You can regulate the appearance of specular highlights by selecting appropriate *Threshold* and *Brightness* values. Leave all other sliders at their default or 0 settings, and click *OK* to apply the new gradients to your image. This can take some time, even if you are using a powerful computer, so be patient. You can then fine-tune the finished image and accentuate the

miniature effect by increasing saturation and contrast as necessary.

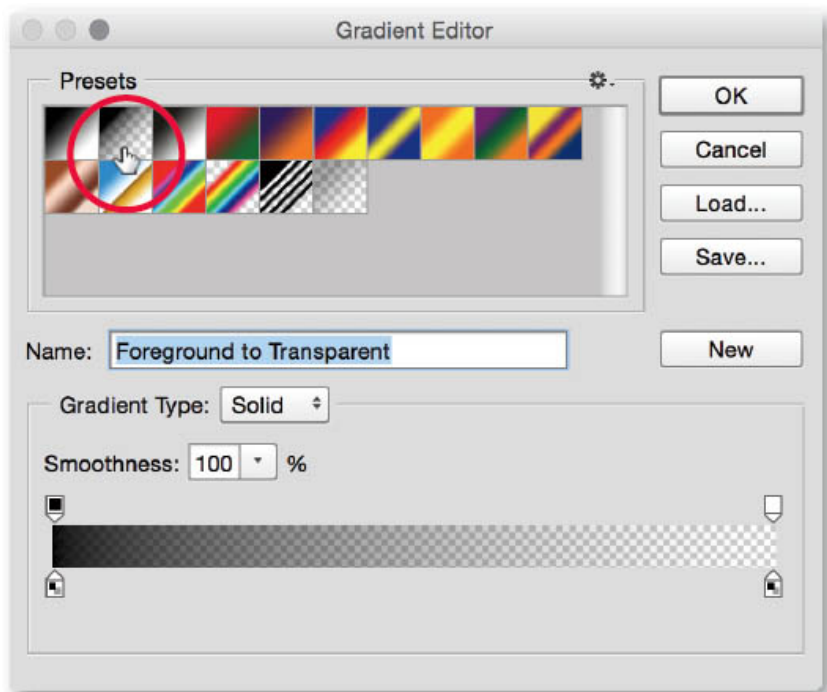


Fig. 404

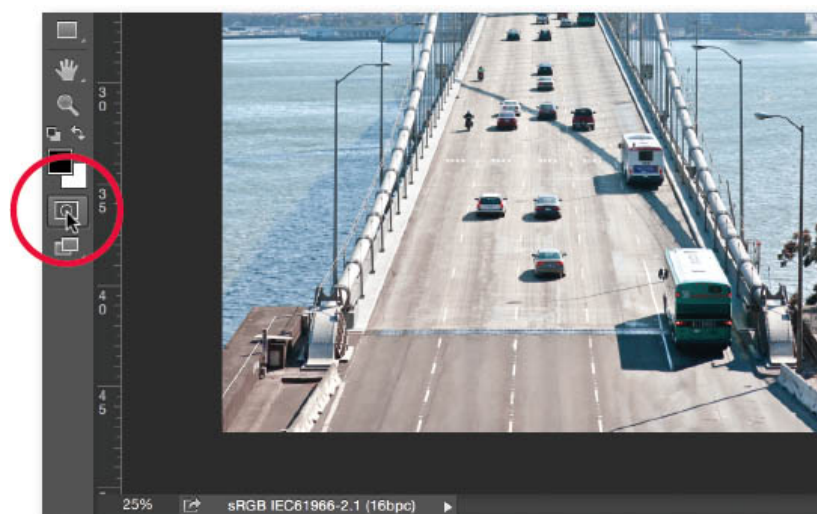


Fig. 405

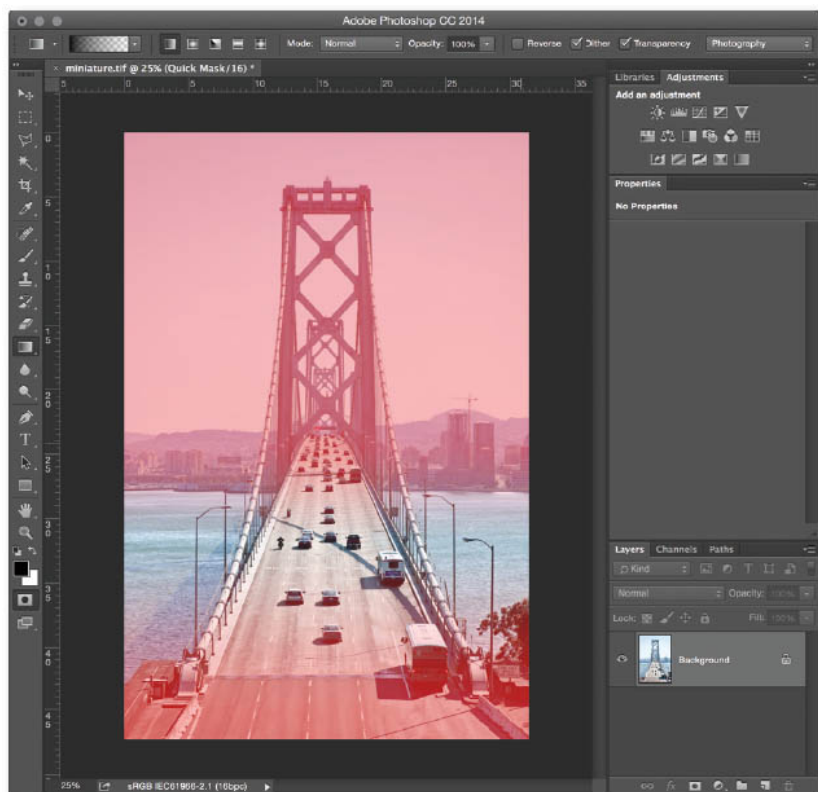


Fig. 406

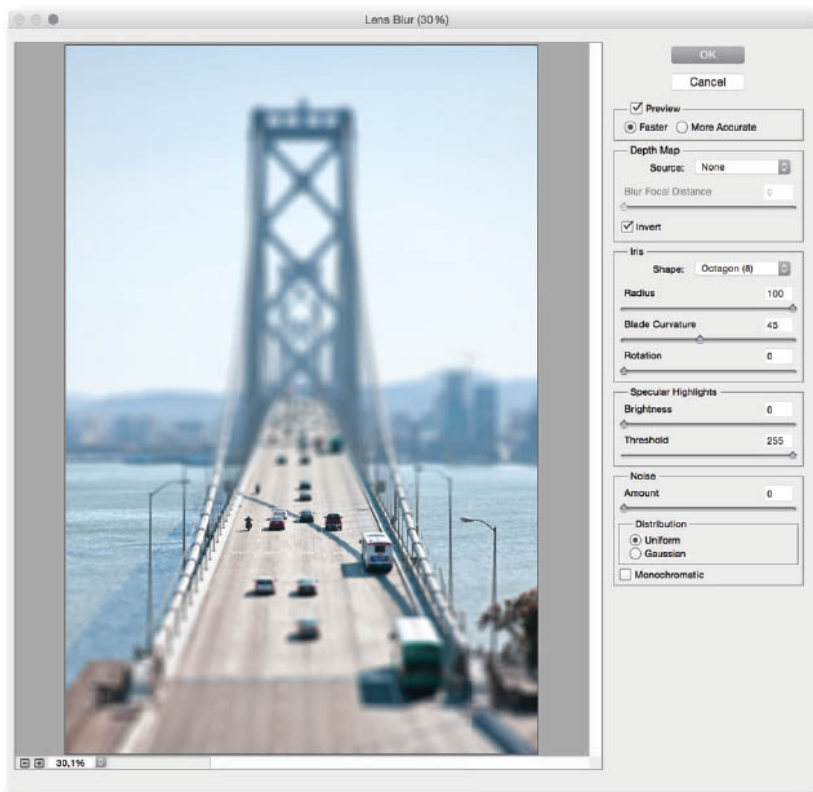


Fig. 407



Have fun creating your own images in the endlessly inspiring world of architectural photography!

My special thanks go to

- ▶ Marcus Bredt for the many motivating conversations
- ▶ Helen Degenhardt and Max Jacobson for their inspiration and new perspectives
- ▶ The staff at Rocky Nook, especially Gerhard Rossbach, Joan Dixon, and Matthias Rossmanith

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